

CRITICAL REVIEW

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Leszek Kolakowski

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Leszek Kolakowski

ON THE PRACTICABILITY
OF LIBERALISM:
WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

The radical liberal ideal of a completely neutral state is unattainable. A liberal society must educate its young, and this means engendering liberal principles in them. Fear of the law is not sufficient to sustain liberal society; conversely, if everything depends on fear of the law, the result will be the multiplication of laws in order to regulate everything, education having failed to impart self-restraint. Nor is the desire for freedom so natural that it need not be implanted through education. For similar reasons, the welfare state and a degree of economic regulation are, at least at this point in history, necessary for the survival of liberal societies.

Criticism of liberal ideas, whether conservative, socialist, or Christian, is widespread; it is aimed at liberalism as a normative doctrine (a response to the question, By what criteria ought social institutions be judged?) as much as it aims at it as an empirical, quasi-empirical, or historical doctrine (a response to the questions, What are the actual motivations or aspirations of individuals? In what type of institutional framework does the increase of wealth and general well-being have the best chance? What historical forces created the institutions that guarantee liberties in contemporary liberal societies? etc.)

I emphasize from the beginning that I accept the liberal concept of

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negative liberty, defined as that range of activities that the law leaves to individual choice and toward which the state avows its indifference. It goes without saying that this concept, which relates negatively to the law, is not applicable to the Hobbesian hypothetical state of nature. Where there are no laws to impose restrictions on liberty there is no liberty either; without limitations liberty becomes *conceptually* impossible. It further goes without saying that negative liberty involves an indefinite range of degrees. Around this point misgivings have inevitably arisen: if there is a continuous gradation of liberty, how can the dividing line between liberal and totalitarian societies be established, given that some room for choice—however reduced or minuscule—remains in totalitarian regimes, except perhaps in the most extreme cases (as in Maoist China or communist Albania)? One might think therefore that liberal and totalitarian societies differ from one another only quantitatively. Yet this is not entirely accurate. Totalitarianism is not defined by “less liberty” but rather by its will to destroy, to the extent technically possible, all civil society, interpersonal ties, forms of communication, information, exchange, and organization, which are not arbitrarily imposed by the organs of government. This naturally implies the absence of many essential civil liberties found in a liberal society: freedom of speech, movement, and association with others to defend particular interests by nonviolent means, freedom to pursue all sorts of economic activities. These essential liberties, not liberty *tout court*, adequately establish a clear “qualitative” distinction between a liberal and a totalitarian society, however obviously true it may be that there are societies relatively more and less liberal and totalitarianisms more and less perfect in their destruction of civil society.

The liberal rejoinders to criticism of the concept of negative liberty seem to me well justified. In effect, this concept does not in any way presuppose that there are no fundamental and legitimate human needs that are not included in the concept; nor that the distinction between good and evil is automatically abolished; nor that a guarantee of this liberty is all that is needed for human affairs to be happily governed to the satisfaction of all. Everyone needs to eat, but there is no substantial reason to declare that if I have enough to eat I am “free from hunger,” and it would be simply absurd to suggest that liberal theorists have failed to notice that people need to eat. Not to suffer hunger is an elementary claim, but it should not necessarily pass for a specific type of liberty; the same is true of “freedom from unemployment.” Neither does liberty as negatively conceived presuppose that conflicts between

liberty and other desirable goods are impossible. To the contrary, such conflicts appear at every turn in all liberal societies, and most of the major controversies are reducible to this one, including laws concerning abortion, monopolies, private possession of firearms, restraints on the press and television, and so on.

One might argue that definitions are discretionary in any case and that, provided a definition is reasonably clear, it can be arbitrarily constructed. But definitions are not innocent. Since the word "liberty" has always been associated with positive values, the tendency has been to impose on it an insupportable load: it was made to carry all goods thought to be desirable. Defenders of communist regimes have always exploited this vague notion of liberty, which gathers all justifiable human objectives into an aggregate: "true, under our regimes the people lack freedom of speech and association, but on the other hand they are free from unemployment." The result is a draw: while certain liberties are enjoyed in the United States, others are enjoyed in the Cambodia of Pol Pot.

The Augustinian doctrine according to which one is free not by virtue of having a choice between good and evil but rather by effectively choosing the good is readily disposed to serve totalitarian ideologies. In effect, according to this philosophy, the fewer possibilities for choice we have, that is, the more our lives are governed by constraints, by a power that *knows* how to distinguish good from evil, the freer we actually are.

Ideally speaking, if most of our actions are thought to have a moral meaning, perfect liberty is embodied in a regime that leaves no choice to individuals, that is to say, in a totalitarian state. The collision between political ideologies that presuppose this doctrine does not consist in that one of them is totalitarian and the other is not; the collision is between different totalitarianisms each of which would defend its monopoly on defining the distinction between good and evil. Communist totalitarianism was always strongly moralistic, even if it did not commonly employ the terms "good" and "evil" because their origins are bound up with the Christian tradition; it knew precisely what was permissible and what was commanded by higher historical reasons.

To accept the liberal definition of liberty does not at all imply the acceptance of liberal philosophy in either its normative or its quasi-empirical version, since nothing in the definition indicates what degree of liberty is the most desirable or possible, or how to resolve its inevitable conflicts with other values. Still, it bears repeating that defi-

nitions are not innocent, and this applies to the liberal definition of liberty no less than to opposing definitions. It defines the extent of liberty by the amount of choice that is legally left to the individual under given circumstances, and does not extend to these circumstances themselves, which are ever subject to chance, and which obviously limit the power of the individual and thereby the ends he can actually attain. I never have the power to accomplish all that I want to, as circumstances constantly impose limits on my realizable objectives, but I am nonetheless free to the extent that no one has the *right* to force me to choose this rather than that. What is in question here is choice as such, not choice between good and evil. The liberal definition has no need for the latter distinction; it can function without it; yet neither does it logically exclude it. Or does it?

A radical liberal might respond: the distinction between good and evil is not necessary for the proper functioning of the state, but each individual is free to construct it. It is not the concern of the state to decide what is morally good and evil, but only what is allowed and what prohibited. Otherwise the state would arrogate to itself an unjustifiable doctrinal privilege and set itself up as an ideological regime, and it is precisely the liberal program that wants to prevent this from happening.

This is easy to say, but immediately the questions arise: what is the foundation of the law, and according to what criteria should the restrictions imposed by the law be determined? Perhaps the liberal definition of liberty does not expressly state that the virtues of a political regime are measured by the range of freedom granted to individuals, but without a doubt it implies this. Yet liberal theorists always admit that legal restrictions are necessary. At issue is not an anarchistic utopia but rather the ideal of a minimal state. How to establish this minimum? The traditional restriction, "liberty with the limits of not harming others," is not a very happy solution; when I write a negative book review I harm the author. What is more, I bother others constantly by the sheer fact of my existence since I take up space and utilize goods that others would enjoy if not for my presence. And if I say instead, "liberty within the limits of not diminishing the liberties of others," either I transform my idea into an empty tautology or I claim that all people ought to have the same degree of liberty without thereby determining what degree is desirable.

Another solution can be sought: one may propose that the degree of liberty the law leaves to all ought to be such that only those acts will be forbidden that, if they were permitted, would somehow render the

social order impossible. The principle is vague enough but reasonable and to some degree useful, hardly contestable in itself. At least it suffices to distinguish what is and is not legal in certain categories of human acts (murder versus attempted suicide, rape versus homosexuality, etc.). By contrast, it is of little value for establishing the desirable degree of state intervention in economic matters, since both the partisans of far-reaching interventionism and the advocates of all-out economic liberalism find arguments to predict disastrous consequences as a result of the others' political programs. In any case, it is widely recognized (even by Hayek) that wholesale *laissez faire* cannot succeed under any cultural conditions and that it is impossible to impose such a policy overnight in societies formed by historical traditions different from those of Europe and North America.

But I do not want to venture into an area where my competence is slight. The matter at hand is to find out whether a radically liberal society is conceivable. I think not, and one of the main reasons for this answer is children.

The radicalism of liberal ideologies can be gauged by listing in order the institutions liberals would like to see removed from state control, beginning with those that would seem the least exposed to critical attack. At the head of the list are national defense and the police, which only a few liberals obsessed with an excessive desire for consistency would want to privatize. The next item is the exclusive right to print money, then regulations concerning environmental protection. Next is education and, finally, medical care, this latter having been attacked most frequently.

When we speak of education we have in mind, of course, universal mandatory education. That a society without it is conceivable is obvious, given that such societies have existed and do exist. That mandatory education, which is practically organized by the state, is a necessary condition for general well-being and technical and economic progress can hardly be contested. But here liberal doctrine knocks up against the question of coercion: people have no choice; they are under constraint. Freedom of choice enters into conflict with the apparent social interest—at least insofar as the latter notion retains a meaning, which liberals sometimes flatly deny. But whose choice is in question here? Not that of children but of their parents, to whom the choice is given or denied, while the children bear the consequences. Thus it is necessary to consider the status of children in liberal ideology. Let us put aside the problem of the definition of childhood; since it is a continuous process of growth, this definition can only be arbitrary,

though necessary to establish precisely when adulthood begins so that certain rights can be legally exercised: rights relating to marriage, sex, license to drive, military service, voting, civil contracts, etc. Different cultures have defined adulthood in distinct ways through rites of initiation or passage. This cannot be dispensed with. But supposing that a consensus were reached on the moment when adulthood begins; what is the status of those beneath this age?

We presuppose that children are incapable of making decisions about the affairs that concern them. Should we say then that they are the property of parents? No, because this would mean that parents can do whatever they like with their children, even though the latter are just as much human beings as the parents are. Shall we say that they are self-possessed, autonomous individuals? No, because in this case not only would they have the right to make decisions they are incapable of making—to engage in sexual relations, to vote, etc.—but besides, the parents would have no responsibility for them and no obligation to take care of them. Both of these options are absurd; the question cannot be resolved in an unambiguous fashion as liberal philosophy would like. So it must be recognized, in accord with common sense and secular tradition, that parents are responsible and must make decisions on behalf of their children, and that children are not things but that they depend on the decisions of others. It must be thus admitted that these decisions cannot be made haphazardly, but that parents have the responsibility to lead their children into adulthood, that is, to give them an education; for a human being properly conceived is not defined merely in biological terms but in cultural terms as well, as a being capable of participating in culture.

This implies that education is just as obligatory as vaccinations against contagious diseases (these perhaps being the most elementary proof that society as such, and not just the individual, is real; yet it may be recalled that when mandatory vaccinations were first introduced they were assailed by objections, at least in England, in the name of liberal principles.)

The argument against compulsory education—"Why should the state know better what is good for children than their parents?"—is no more convincing than analogous arguments against compulsory vaccination or the obligation for cars to meet a number of requirements that are necessary for the safety not only of other road-users but of passengers as well. To be sure, "making people happy by force" has been utterly discredited by the experience of totalitarian regimes, which shows what happens when the self-anointed, privileged owners

of higher historiosophical wisdom (as reliable as numerology) oppress people for the sake of universal happiness in an undefinable future. In the cases under scrutiny, however, it is very specific measures that are at stake, and under a democratic order the population has some instruments to reject the compulsion it considers excessive; and there is hardly an opposition against compulsory schooling. Most of us are ill-informed in many areas of knowledge that are relevant to our life, and willy-nilly we have to rely on some authorities, even though they are not infallible. There is nothing wrong with the general principle that the state is responsible, within limits, for the welfare, both physical and mental, of the citizens; the point of contention is how those limits are to be defined. Nobody persecutes the members of the Flat Earth Society, but even a liberal state would not tolerate teachers who tell children that the Earth actually is flat or that two and two make seventeen. This proves that even a liberal state sees itself as, to some extent, a guardian of truth.

But only here does the real difficulty begin. A liberal can admit somewhat against his grain, though without denying his principles entirely, that mandatory schooling is desirable and that the choice of whether to give children at least an elementary education or to leave them in ignorance and illiteracy—ought not to be offered to parents. But he will insist that the schooling be “neutral” with respect to *Weltanschauung*, since the state is neutral and does not impose any philosophy or religion on its citizens.

Of necessity, however, school equips children not only with a degree of knowledge but also with a fundamental initiation into culture, thus introducing them to a variety of norms, symbols, and values received in the culture; it teaches them language, history, art, and literature, which are full of strongly normative meanings. Schools cannot escape the obligation to teach how to distinguish good from evil. Liberals claim that the task of school is to teach the young, not to indoctrinate them. This is easy to concede as a general principle but the distinction is not at all precise. I accept the principle of the separation of church and state; I am opposed to mandatory religious instruction. But even the enemies of religion will recognize that it is impossible to be socialized into the culture of nominally Christian societies without becoming acquainted with their religious symbols and their past, in which religious history figures as a major component. Is it possible to teach this in a neutral way, that is, without religious dogmas being attacked, condemned, or ridiculed? This task is very difficult, and

requires a great number of highly cultured, open-minded, and tolerant teachers. It is nonetheless not impossible.

Yet to speak of "indoctrination" is not only to have in mind religious or antireligious instruction. The teaching of norms, of morals and symbols specific to a culture, of customs and rites can also be classified as "indoctrination." Moreover, language itself is not "neutral" since it abounds in elements which in their simple meaning convey value judgments and normative distinctions. Can the schools be expected to be neutral in the sense that they abstain from teaching the distinction between good and evil? Can the state itself be neutral in this sense, in order not to run the risk of being condemned as an ideological state—whether communist or theocratic? Do not even the foundations on which liberal law is constructed imply a choice of values that are needed, for example, to protect civil rights?

I can imagine a reply in the spirit of liberal philosophy: "The state is neutral with respect to morality, but to be sure it implies a system of laws. The citizen's responsibility consists in obedience to the laws. It is true that the laws ought to be made in such a way that they protect order, assuring social stability and preventing civil war, but these are objectives that cannot be cause for controversy. As for instruction, it can and even must include elementary knowledge of the law currently in force. It is essential that children know the difference between what is allowed and what is prohibited by law, and for this purpose there is no need for the distinction between good and evil; schools thus remain neutral."

If this reconstruction is fair, it is not necessary (though it is not disallowed), according to liberal philosophy, that citizens make or even recognize the distinction between just and unjust, good and evil; it is quite enough that they obey the legislative norms. This implies that to ensure the reasonably stable and satisfactory functioning of a society, it is enough that people *fear* the law and the punishment they risk by violating it; they need not believe as well that there are norms of behavior one should observe because they are *just*.

Is such a society conceivable, in which law would be the only regulator of social relations by means of the application of fear, and in which the convictions of its members concerning good and evil would have evaporated? Conceivable, yes (even if we have not known such a case empirically), given that the vestiges of moral conscience have been preserved until now even in societies most advanced along the road of modern civilization. Such a society is conceivable, but it is unlikely that it would last long. The stability of a society in which

there was nothing but fear to organize public life would be extremely weak and fragile; such a society would collapse in any critical situation, proving unable to survive any serious trial, whenever the law functioned poorly and became hard to enforce and when social connections, which cannot be maintained by legislative measures, disintegrated. The perfect society according to the liberal recipe would be hurled into an uncontrollable chaos in the event of a crisis.

The idea and institution of the contract is as fundamental for a liberal order as for a democracy; but why must I hold to my contracts? If the answer is only because I otherwise risk punishment, I have no reason to remain bound if the penal system functions in such a way that I can disregard the obligations of the contract. If nothing remains but penal coercion, all contracts and promises are rendered void from the moment I am, for whatever reason, beyond the reach of the police and the gallows. Hobbesian philosophy appears contradictory on this point since it seems to presuppose that nothing but the disposition of force can be relied on and yet *pacta sunt servanda*.

In liberal states, moreover, one observes an obsessive tendency to regulate by law all sorts of human relations—between man and woman, parent and child, wife and husband, boss and subordinate—down to the least detail. Here liberal principles turn against themselves. The less there is to regulate communal life apart from the punitive power of the law, the more laws and regulations are needed to intervene in our life; hence the more repressive the law becomes and the less freedom remains to individuals.

It is not always clear in liberal philosophy whether liberty is held to be a value in itself or rather an instrument needed to ensure social stability and, above all, economic growth and well-being. In the first case, the state is not neutral because it accepts liberty as an end that requires no higher justification. In the second, it is admitted that certain choices must be made, according to circumstances, between more and less liberty, and sometimes even for no liberty at all when ultimate ends are best assured that way. There is no empirical proof to show that these ends—the growth of national income and well-being—are better guaranteed *under all circumstances* by a greater liberty, however true this may be in some conditions.

On this point, too, liberal doctrine has a ready response: to have fewer rather than more external restrictions, to have more rather than less room for personal expression and activity in one's own interest, is a natural desire common to all, so this liberty demands no theoretical justification; it is enough to appeal to nature in support of its claim.

This response is insufficient for two reasons: As much as this description may hold true in the majority of cases, as true as it may be that we—I mean we participants in European civilization—desire liberty *tout court*, it is no less true that the desire for security is equally fundamental and that the conflict between freedom and security is permanent in human existence. It often happens that people are willing to give up freedom (or some degree of freedom) in order to gain security (or a greater degree of security); the temptations of totalitarianism are rooted in this need.

What we have said applies most acutely when children are concerned. Rules of discipline are the condition of a well-functioning school. The nature of the task implies that the institution and the administrative authorities, not the schoolchildren, establish the educational programs. It does not seem that young children even want to have much freedom of choice at school, though this need gradually increases with age.

But there is another, perhaps more important, reason for limiting our belief in the benevolent desire for freedom that nature engrafts in us. Supposing that we share this natural desire (whatever its description would be in biological terms), there is another, equally natural and very strong desire besides: the desire to dominate, to be obeyed, and to impose on others one's own "genuine" ideas of happiness, the good, and the truth. Despotism is no less natural than freedom, and it is for this reason that the anarchistic ideal is impracticable. Its realization would depend on a wholly improbable negative condition: that no political movements exist which aspire to absolute power and are capable, under anarchic conditions, of imposing their will on a disorganized society. This absence being improbable, anarchism is, practically speaking, an ideology in the service of tyranny.

The same objection cannot be made against liberal ideology, which has always insisted on the need for the state as an indispensable instrument, indeed a necessary evil, to protect the social order and security. Yet there is an analogous problem. In order that liberty be maintained within the limits of the law, it is not enough that the law exist; it must be enforced and obeyed, and this depends on social conditions that law alone cannot ensure. The network of social assistance organized by the welfare state has been the object of frequent attack by liberal thought. But the welfare state, however reformable it may be, is irreversible once it has been instituted with its massive bureaucratic machinery. To replace the welfare state with voluntary private insurance would pro-

voke great unrest and would risk shaking the social order to such an extent that the state might fall victim to totalitarian forces.

Whatever one thinks of the justice of the welfare state, the idea of abolishing it is a symptom of ideological dogmatism. Freedom demands incessant vigilance; it is not and never will be secured by means of inaction.

It would be even more absurd to think of returning to the idea—already abandoned by many liberals by the end of the nineteenth century—that the state and the law have no right to intervene in the terms of contracts as long as they are free, that is to say, entered into without physical compulsion. If this program were taken seriously, all legislation concerning labor contracts—and even civil contracts concerning loans and interest rates—would be abolished. Such legislation was implemented in many countries under the pressure from various sides—socialists, conservatives, unions. It was justified by the principle that it is right for the state to protect the weakest (within limits, again, as this principle can be abused to such an extent that it produces support for a totalitarian regime) and by the observation that it is not true that an unemployed worker is as free, that is, has as much scope for choice, as does a company that might employ him. This principle may be moralistic, but it is not clear why this should necessarily be condemned.

However, practical considerations, not their moral justifications, have been from the beginning no less important and they are still valid. It might be the case (even though it is difficult to assess what is ideological and what is empirical in this contention) that the abolition of labor legislation would prove to be beneficial for all after a number of decades or generations. But it is plausible to expect that the entire fabric of the society would be shattered in the meantime as a result of social unrest.

To summarize:

1. The liberal definition of negative liberty is not only acceptable but is the only shelter against the abuses of tyrannical ideologies. Accepting this definition does not presuppose that negative liberty resolves all social problems or that it is forbidden to limit liberty where it is in conflict with other values.
2. The idea of the minimal state is acceptable but only as a very general regulative concept, since it itself says nothing about the content of this minimum. Acceptable, too, is the concept of the state as a necessary evil, but not as the object of a special cult as in Hegel and certain other German metaphysicians.

3. The radically liberal state is a utopia whose principles finally turn against themselves. The liberal state cannot survive by the mere inertia of a nonintervening, neutral policy; it demands—as it has been affirmed many times over—the vigilant attention of its citizens, of all who feel responsible to the common cause, *res publica*. And the civic virtues on which the viability of the liberal state depends are not simply born spontaneously; they demand a type of “indoctrination.” A perfectly neutral liberal state is unviable. We need to defend the imperfect liberal state, constructed on a system of compromises between worthy objectives that encroach on one another: the idea of a neutral state and neutral public education on the one hand, the absolute necessity for civic and moral education on the other; contractarian liberty on this side, defense of the social equilibrium by means of public assistance on the opposite side.

It is easy to infer the benefits of an ideological and economic dictatorship beginning from commendable principles—such as the protection of the weak, the welfare state, equality of opportunity, and the need for moral education—if these principles are pressed to the extreme with the intention of fulfilling them perfectly. But from opposing principles, which are also commendable—free contract, the neutral state, the minimal state, personal responsibility, individual initiative and inventiveness—it is just as easy, if they are applied consistently, to draw a picture of an unviable political organization that threatens to collapse under the weight of its own virtues. The expansion of moral nihilism and hedonistic indifference, the disappearance of civic-mindedness, the decline of the educational system, and the growth of inequalities to the point where envy becomes explosive can leave society prey to despotism. This is an equally well-known truth.

Freedom will always be a fragile plant, notwithstanding the recent victories of democracy and liberal ideas in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the police are never omnipotent, even in totalitarian regimes, much less in liberal societies.

I leave justice aside. I speak only of what is practicable and reliable.

From its inception the liberal philosophy of the Enlightenment has been attacked as a form of utopian thinking. Liberalism, according to this criticism, takes as its starting point an ahistorical individual who is everywhere the same, with the same needs, aspirations, and ways of thinking, in order then to build upon this foundation an ideal constitution that is fully applicable to all societies of the world and is deduced philosophically from universal human nature. But this model individ-

ual simply does not exist and never has existed, and for this reason the liberal project must fail totally.

In general this critique is entirely justified, as today's postcommunist world confirms well enough, but it is also important to reflect on its dangers. Since some degree of indoctrination, that is, of historical continuation, is inevitable, it is necessary to accept that the content of this indoctrination is defined by the experiences of historically differentiated communities, that it should be specifically adapted to these experiences, and that it cannot be deduced from the list of the rights of man. This having been said, it is also true that this list is indispensable in countering the often-expressed extreme relativism that freedom is a good thing for us, but despotism and theocracy are good for other peoples who have different aspirations from ours. There are communal interests that cannot be reduced to the interests of each member of society separately, and there is a need to identify with national or tribal communities and to preserve their inherited symbols. Yet it would be dangerous to renounce, on the basis of this thinking, the idea of humanity as a moral notion and not merely as a zoological category. Without this moral notion of humanity, there would be nothing to prevent me from treating others who do not belong to my nation, my race, my mythology, as a different biological species or as things. It would be catastrophic if the heritage of the Enlightenment—and of the great universal religions as well—fell into oblivion. As in all other human affairs, a compromise must be forged between the noble naïveté of a liberal utopia—which imagines that it can cancel history, community, cultural differences, symbols, and myths—and the wholesale affirmation of exclusivisms that dispense with the concept of humanity altogether.

Translated from the French by Lissa McCullough.



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RICHARD RORTY'S LIBERALISM

Richard Rorty, with his tendency to shock, to provoke, and to seize on Continental fashions, might be thought an unlikely liberal. Nevertheless, Rorty illustrates very well some of the characteristic weaknesses of contemporary liberalism. To the extent that he draws upon postmodern and deconstructionist sources, he highlights, and radicalizes, the liberal urge to break out of frozen identities and to destabilize static roles and fixed stations in life. His distinctive version of pragmatism yields a (novel) way of drawing liberal boundaries between private and public, culture and justice. And his antifoundationalism helps to legitimize a typical liberal reluctance to engage in any very ambitious social criticism. What distinguishes Rorty's liberalism is its higher degree of candor, which at least acknowledges that a liberal vision of things, far from being "neutral" toward rival ideas of the good, is implicated in the defense of a particular way of life.

The two leading *enfants terribles* of Anglo-American philosophy in the last ten years or so have been Richard Rorty and Alasdair MacIntyre. In recent years, Rorty and MacIntyre have come under sharp attack from a wide range of critics for being what philosophers are supposed to be, namely gadflies, stinging us into wakeful criticism of long-dormant intellectual dogmas and cultural pieties. The notable difference between MacIntyre and Rorty, of course, is that MacIntyre has emerged as a leading critic of contemporary liberalism whereas Rorty presents himself as a defender, albeit an unconventional defender, of

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liberalism. However, paradoxically, it is precisely Rorty's intellectual radicalism that clarifies what is at stake in contemporary liberal philosophy and helps us see why this philosophy is committed to a moral vision that is bereft of radicalism. After reviewing those features of Rorty's theorizing that make his liberalism appear so unconventional, we shall see that Rorty's thought is in fact paradigmatic of those cultural, political, and philosophical impulses that incline contemporary liberalism more toward an affirmation of the existing social order than a thoroughgoing criticism of it.

Thirty-odd years ago, Henry Kariel published a peculiar article arguing that an important source of liberal constitutionalism could be found in Nietzsche.¹ Now Rorty offers us the notion that American liberalism can enhance its self-understanding by locating its source in, among other things, faddish French intellectuals like Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard. The publication of Rorty's two volumes of *Philosophical Papers* (Volume 1: *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], hereafter *ORT*; and Volume 2: *Essays on Heidegger and Others* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], hereafter *EOH*) affords an opportune occasion to evaluate the success of Rorty's project of reconceptualizing American liberalism with the aid of some unlikely devices, namely French Nietzscheanism and French Heideggerianism.

Metatheoretical Debates

Starting with a celebrated book published in 1979 and with an ever-increasing flow of work thereafter, Richard Rorty won for himself a large quantity of fame and acclaim by arguing that after a couple millennia of Western philosophy, philosophers should finally forgo the quest for a divinized (upper-case) Truth in favor of a set of de-divinized (lower-case) truths. However, Rorty commonly carried his deconstructive enterprise far enough that even the lower-case truths seemed to be replaced by mere cultural conventions, shared prejudices, or even contingently acquired jargons; he thus seemed to skirt a relativist quagmire, breeding forms of incoherence drawn attention to by a host of critics.² While it may be easier for his critics to show that the road from Aristotle to Einstein represents an epistemic progress bearing a relation to a real world out there, the forms of incoherence detected by the critics in Rorty's relativism, or at least his quasi relativism,³ also have their counterparts in corresponding forms of incoher-

ence in Rorty's social and political thought. Here too, critics have not been lacking. Following a brief review of the general critique of Rorty's antirealism, it is the latter variety of criticism that forms the main focus of this essay.

What the critics' complaint comes to is that, just as is the case with individuals, the story that a culture tells itself—either scientifically, in its picture of the universe, or politically, in its assumptions about the society's own moral properties—is often a false story, and Rorty's account of truth fails to do justice to why the false story is false.⁴ Rorty's account fails because the problem is not that the false story “doesn't work,”⁵ or that it is out of step with the society's cultural evolution, or that it has exhausted its possibilities for furthering the society's cultural or political needs,⁶ since the story might indeed “work” very well for certain purposes (such as helping to bolster the culture's current delusions), and might have a lot of mileage left in it for certain cultural purposes. Rather, the untrue story is untrue because it falsifies, is untrue to, what the story is about;⁷ for without reference to a reality that is independent of our stories, how can talk of stories that are obtuse, self-deluding, or merely rationalizing get a purchase at all? On this view, the critics, in holding out for a more robust conception of truth, are not assumed to be in possession of some magic route to the truth, either by a privileged set of natural-scientific procedures or by a privileged mode of metaphysical cognition. Their point, quite simply, is that the distinction between a true story and a false story that either an individual or a society tells itself implies *something* in virtue of which the true story is true, and *something* on behalf of which one exerts oneself, in dialogue with an interlocutor, to show that one's own story is a truer account of what the story concerns than is one's interlocutor's. If, on the other hand, the ultimate aim is simply to spawn as many redescriptions as possible (EOH, 154–55), we seem to be left with no normative constraints on the stories that we can get away with.

An important question that will arise even for a sympathetic reader of Rorty is, what actually hangs upon the distinction between the upper case and the lower case, between Reason and reason, or between Truth and truth?⁸ For as Rorty himself readily acknowledges, most of the contemporary addressees of his antimetaphysical rhetoric take themselves to have abandoned the old-style foundationalism, the quest for an absolute Archimedean point, no less than Rorty has.⁹ After all, in the debates about realism and antirealism that are relevant here, Rorty's interlocutors have not been Descartes and Plato but such

enlightened representatives of late twentieth-century intellectual life as Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Bernard Williams. Rorty's anti-foundationalist and anti-universalist rhetoric might be entirely reasonable if the only targets *had* been thinkers like Descartes and Plato; but since his targets are also anti-Cartesians and anti-Platonists, the suspicion grows that Rorty is mounting an assault not only upon Reason and Truth, but also upon reason and truth (as is certainly the case with thinkers like Derrida and Lyotard), and the danger lurks that he will eventually find himself firmly in the company not only of engaging postmodernist radicals but also of irrationalists and nihilists.

In some of his essays, Rorty challenges those philosophers who have sought to argue that cognitive realism is philosophically mandated in the domain of natural science in a way that it isn't in the domain of ethical life. Rorty's response is to undermine the science/ethics distinction, and to infer that if realism (the correspondence of validity-claims to a subject-independent reality) is dispensable in the latter domain, so it is in the former.¹⁰ I would be inclined to argue in the opposite direction: to the extent that the physics/ethics dichotomy is subverted, a realist metatheory is warranted in both domains rather than in neither¹¹—for reasons that have been given a classic statement in Iris Murdoch's book, *The Sovereignty of Good*. Rorty thinks that pragmatism is what has liberated him from the albatross of Western metaphysics, with all its bogus problems and misspent energy, whereas if my analysis is correct, Rorty's pragmatism is itself an albatross, preventing him from giving a more straightforward justification of his moral and political views, so that he wouldn't have to waste half his energies defending himself against criticisms of what is widely perceived to be his relativism. So, paradoxically, a realist metatheory, whether for natural science or ethics, is to be preferred even by Rorty's *pragmatist* standard!—a kind of mirror image of the paradox noted by the critics, that in order for Rorty to vindicate his pragmatism he must take the *realist* claim that he has grasped an insight, twigged something about the world and our relation to it, that has eluded his opponents.¹² As soon as he starts to make his pitch for pragmatism, he is forced onto the realist's turf; and even if he manages to stay on his own turf, it turns out that the game is easier to play, more "expedient" and with fewer hassles, in a realist than in a pragmatist vocabulary. Therefore, our conclusion, parallel to the conclusion that Rorty's epistemological critics have come to with respect to his rejection of natural-scientific realism, is that Rorty's rejection of moral realism is not a liberation, but places him in a political and intellectual cul-de-sac.

A New Kind of Liberalism

The kind of liberalism developed in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* rested upon Rorty's attempt to segregate how intellectuals relate to their own selves (namely, striving to perfect themselves, or to make of their lives a work of art) from how citizens relate to other selves (namely, striving for greater social justice).¹³ Rorty's liberal bifurcation of public and private, politics and culture, has generated evident paradoxes, as more than one critic has noted. Tom Sorell, for instance, refers to Rorty's intention to substitute a poetic culture in the West for the reigning scientific culture, and then asks, "Can the politics of a poetic culture really be as staid as liberal politics?"¹⁴ It is as if the glamorous cultural superman conjured up by the postmodernist side of Rorty's vision of intellectual life (Rorty's "strong poet") ineluctably reverted to a demure Clark Kentish political stance when required to enter back into dealings with the public world.¹⁵ This embrace of audacious "postphilosophy" paired with an all-too-familiar political liberalism may have the appearance of a kind of cultural schizophrenia—a radical split between Rorty's pragmatic "let's get the job done" self and his aesthetic "let's play with new vocabularies" self. But if so, Rorty regards this as a salutary schizophrenia; for what are virtues in the sphere of intellectual life—radical vocabulary switches, bold challenges to existing idioms, wild leaps of poetic imagination—may turn out to be not only nonvirtues but in fact serious vices in the sphere of political relationships. One does not have to be a cautious or timid liberal in order to grant that Rorty has a point here in emphasizing the contrast between the demands of intellectual life and those of political life.

So I am inclined to agree with Rorty that if one is swayed by postmodernist (Nietzschean or Hiedeggerian) cultural impulses, one should at least have the political good sense to confine these impulses to the privacy of the academy. But the question still remains whether Rorty's own postmodernist proclivities contribute in a helpful or unhelpful way to the political vision that he urges upon us. That is, is it perhaps the case that even after they have been safely "privatized," these trendy cultural impulses impinge upon a sane and sensible politics?

Rorty's postmodernism (notwithstanding his attempt to "privatize" it as the cultural stance of a bourgeois aesthete) encourages him to accentuate what is already an unfortunate tendency of liberal theory, namely, liberal theorists' reluctance to engage with the kind of large

and ambitious claims about human nature and the essence of our social situation that alone furnish a critical foothold for bedrock judgments about the global adequacy or deficiency of a given mode of life. Rorty criticizes the kind of liberal philosophy that generates universalistic and foundationalist claims—as if this kind of liberalism approaches too closely to the cosmic ambitions of Platonism. So he likes Sandel's critique of Rawls when Rawls had thought that he was striving after universalistic claims on behalf of liberalism (ORT, 301n2, 199–200), and he likes Rawls when Rawls is brought around to disavowing his universalistic claims in favor of a more historicist self-interpretation (ORT, 301n2, 175–96). But even Rawls at his *most* ambitious falls well short of the dimension of theorizing encountered in the great traditions of preliberal thought stretching from Aristotle to Machiavelli and antiliberal theorizing from Rousseau to Nietzsche. Matters are only made worse when even Rawls is theoretically cut down to size (or when Rawls cuts himself down to size in order to appease communitarian critics). Rorty's expressly historicist and quasi-relativist rhetoric suggests that the post-Nietzschean theorists he admires are *more* radical, whereas in actual fact they are *less* radical, than the kinds of thinkers whose theorizing issues in bedrock judgments about whether the substance of a mode of life fulfils the most worthy aptitudes of human beings, and therefore whether the way of life to which one commits oneself is rationally deserving of that commitment. Is the fidelity yielded by liberals to the system of social practices that define a liberal society theoretically warranted? In employing a rhetoric that emphasizes that he is addressing a community restricted to those ("we liberals") already committed to liberalism—that is, committed in advance of theoretical scrutiny—Rorty makes it a point of pride that now one is engaged in a postphilosophical intellectual activity where such questions never even arise! Should we really celebrate the end of the epoch of philosophy if the philosopher's successor, the postphilosopher, is conceived as one who only undertakes to preach to the converted?

What's Wrong with Liberal Complacency?

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty relies heavily on Judith Shklar's articulation of the liberal ideal.¹⁶ If the supreme philosophical standard is the avoidance of evil, there is little to criticize in liberalism; the avoidance of evil is indeed, as Shklar believes, what defines the

liberal impulse in politics. Relative to the barbarities of fascism, Stalinism, racism, and so on, liberal complacency (the antiliberal's standard complaint) may even appear entirely justifiable as a theoretical stance. The problem is that it severely constricts the horizon of theoretical reflection by which we allow ourselves to be challenged. All we can say as theorists is that a society that makes available civil liberties and a reasonable degree of equity in the distribution of material resources is preferable to a society that denies civil liberties and maintains blatant inequalities. This proposition is not readily contestable, but considered as *exhaustive* of what should concern the contemporary political philosopher, it manifestly leaves out a good deal of what theorists might otherwise undertake to submit to critical reflection.

What's my beef with liberalism? Rorty is a social democrat and I am a social democrat. Rorty believes Western societies are fairly decent relative to the going alternatives, and I believe that Western societies are fairly decent relative to the going alternatives. So where do we differ? Largely, we differ on our conceptions of the proper dimensions of theory. If the only legitimate standards for assessing liberal society are (1) whether it has civil rights, and (2) whether it has a welfare state, then we must say, yes it has these things, but then there is little else for a theorist to say. The only space for theory reposes on questions of social justice in the distribution of material resources. These are not negligible concerns, but what about all the other things we might interrogate? Do members of these societies live lives that are, on the whole, satisfying? Consider: (1) divorce rates, (2) rates of drug use, (3) widespread reliance on psycho-therapists, (4) political apathy, (5) a banal and empty popular culture. It doesn't require a very penetrating cultural analysis to conclude that what we have is a society whose members seem to be very seriously screwed up with respect to what they want out of life, and seem unable to understand or express in any focused way a relationship between their private anxieties and social possibilities that might be available to them at the political level. (Needless to say, in addition to the issues I have picked out, there is a great deal one might say about the massive inequalities of wealth and power in liberal societies, but I am assuming that on these topics, liberal theory allows itself to pass judgment.)

Now, one might challenge this account as one-sidedly pessimistic, and say that it fails to do justice to the positive aspects of contemporary life. Fine. But the point I'm trying to make about the adequacy or inadequacy of liberal theorizing is that even if one entirely accepts my account in its grimmest version, these features of modern life are

nonetheless fully compatible with meeting the egalitarian and civil-libertarian standards of liberal theory — that is to say, the *only* theoretical standards that liberal theory permits itself to apply to social life. One may quarrel as one pleases with my cultural sermonizing; but what is *not* controversial, I think, is the suggestion that a social theory that exempts itself in principle from having anything to say about such phenomena of modern social existence is not a social theory that will have much critical bite to it.

Last year a public opinion poll in what was then the Soviet Union showed that 65 percent of the Soviet respondents preferred the “American lifestyle” among a range of other possibilities. (The “Asian-Japanese lifestyle” came in second, at 23 percent.) What kind of a world are we living in, where *everyone* wants to be an American, and live the American lifestyle? And what kind of political philosophy do we have today, when philosophers feel in no way obliged to offer reflections suggesting that there might be anything problematic in this? Of one thing we may be certain: it is not the kind of political philosophy made available to us by philosophers from Plato onward. But Rorty tells us that the “old-time philosophy”¹⁷ associated with Plato and his successors is precisely what we don’t need; indeed, he goes further, saying in effect that if inhabitants of a liberal society, materially comfortable in their private life and behaving decently toward one another in their public life, tend to become complacent when they cease to be haunted by philosophical anxieties, well, what’s wrong with complacency?¹⁸

Liberalism and Postmodernity

In labeling the new kind of liberalism that Rorty promises “postmodernist bourgeois liberalism” (*ORT*, 197–202), his emphasis cannot be on the adjective “bourgeois,” since this is intrinsic to liberalism as we understand it today and as we have understood it since the seventeenth century; therefore the emphasis must fall on the tag “postmodernist.” Rorty helped very notably to get the postmodern bandwagon going, both directly, through his own work, and indirectly, by helping to popularize Gallic fashions for an Anglo-American audience.¹⁹ One may well ask, did he do us a service in helping us to think of ourselves as contingent selves whose self-definitions are never immune from redefinition and recomposition, forever in flux? Does the postmodern movement contribute to our liberation, or does it do the opposite of liberating us? J.G.A. Pocock has recently suggested that postmodern

thinking makes us less free by denying to us the possibility of the integrative experience of citizenship:

A community or a sovereign that demands the whole of one's allegiance may be foreclosing one's freedom of choice to be this or that kind of person; that was the early modern and modern danger. A plurality of communities or sovereignties that take turns in demanding one's allegiance, while conceding that each and every allocation of allegiance is partial, contingent, and provisional, is denying one the freedom to make a final commitment which determines one's identity, and that is plainly the post-modern danger. I recall reading, a couple of months ago, an article in the *Economist* forecasting that Canada might become the first post-modern democracy, and wondering whether this was an encouraging prospect. It is one thing to decide that being a Canadian—or, like me, a New Zealander—offers one an open range of identities, and that freedom consists in retaining one's mobility in choosing between them. It is quite another when the sovereign or quasi-sovereign powers of this world get together to inform one that there is no choice of an identity, no commitment of an allegiance, no determination of one's citizenship or personality that they regard as other than provisional (or may not require one at any moment to unmake). Under post-modern conditions we do confront these alliances of unmakers, deconstructors, and decenterers, and our citizenship may have to be our means of telling them where they get off. . . . We may have to resist [the post-modern world], and say that we have decided and declared who we are, that our words have gone forth and cannot be recalled, unspoken or deconstructed.²⁰

Can political theorists today, as we approach the threshold of the twenty-first century, bring themselves to entertain the thought that in this respect we were freer in the modern world of Rousseau and Hegel, or even in the premodern world of Plato and Aristotle, when stable citizenship was still a possibility, than we are in the radically unstable world of Derrida, where, in Pocock's words, "the languages, constantly producing themselves, are more real than the persons speaking them"?²¹ If Rorty's deconstructionist liberalism implies the rule of absolute contingency, where our selfhood is both groundless and indefinitely revisable and redefinable, then perhaps this offers not a promise of emancipation but the prospect of a postmodernist nightmare of confused roles and incoherent identities. When it is observed that everything in modern life militates against settled patterns of social order, that family and occupational norms, no less than economic and political structures, are subject to ubiquitous and ever-increasing turbulence, and that mobility is the universal law of contemporary social life, one might begin to suspect that the post-modern psyche is unliveable. Pastiche is what defines the postmodernist approach to art and culture. The anxiety naturally arises that pastiche will

also define the postmodernist approach to shaping identity and constituting one's selfhood—that is, the self as a cut-and-paste job.

Rorty's interest in *la mode française* allows him to present his liberalism in flashy packaging that conventional liberal doctrines typically lack, but this fancy wrapping comes at a price. His penchant for paradox-generating vocabularies lands Rorty in the following dilemma: *either* absolute irony, where every seemingly serious political commitment is dissolved in Derridean playfulness, *or* relatively sober and more or less irrevocable claims to validity of one's social-political commitments. The problem is that Rorty wants to have it both ways: no restraints in casting all fixed identities into the deconstructionist vortex, *and* the prerogative to engage in serious-sounding polemics on behalf of his preferred version of liberalism. The result is, predictably enough, a kind of pragmatic contradiction, an incoherence in the relations between his intellectual commitments and his political commitments, matching the incoherence critics have located in his critique of epistemology (see note 2). Now, needless to say, Rorty is very good at being a slippery fish to grab; nonetheless, at the end of the day either one is serious about not being serious about anything, or one isn't. Either one really means it when one says that all of the self's vocabularies—which are in turn the source of its practical allegiances—are revocable, playfully ironic, and experimentally tentative, or this claim too is just more fooling around. Is Rorty's postmodernist notion of selves without centers (ORT, 185 n24, 188, 191–93; EOH, 1, 197)²² one that a committed liberal can comfortably embrace?

It is Rorty's slipperiness, not so much in standing by his commitments as in explaining *why* he stands by his commitments, that provokes more traditional theorists to feel exasperated, never entirely sure what, if anything, in this new world of ubiquitous irony, they are being asked to take seriously. As Rorty puts it in one place, in his ideal “poeticizing” culture, intellectuals like himself will “desire to be as polymorphous . . . as possible,” to dream up new cultural contexts “for the hell of it” (ORT, 110). It is this appearance of frivolity that prompts Thomas Pangle, for instance, to dub Rorty's political position a “peculiarly apolitical or uncivic liberalism”²³—that is, a liberalism for aesthetes, where politics itself is aestheticized.²⁴ If the only binding determinant of cultural and political allegiances is whether it so happens that a culture still gets a thrill out of its old vocabularies, or instead begins to find these boring and decides to try for something new,²⁵ how do we know that liberalism too won't be tossed into the cultural rubbish bin tomorrow morning, along with all the other discarded vocabularies that we have come to feel were inhibiting us from the practice of free self-creation? If the reply comes that liberalism is what mandates and protects the creativity of the centerless self, is this a suffi-

cient guarantee that Rorty's own political preferences (for he hardly allows them to have a more exalted status than this)²⁶ are immune from the postmodernist vortex?²⁷

As noted above, Rorty's thinking is frankly historicist. This invites the question, why does he think *we* need his new pluralizing, deconstructive, identity-undermining vocabulary? Given the conditions of modern social life, one wonders whether philosophers should be opting for a radical-sounding rhetoric that, as it were, spins the dials all the more; one wonders whether it doesn't make more sense, instead, to opt for a rhetoric that accentuates patterns of coherence in what is already a highly fragmented, precarious, and easily destabilized mode of existence. Living as we do a postmodern *life*, it might be thought that we need least of all a postmodern *philosophy* that can only help to destabilize further the often chaotic jumble of contemporary social relations.²⁸

If what we mean, then, by life in a postmodern age is not simply that certain philosophers newly endeavor to reshuffle their disjointed vocabularies, but rather, that members of a liberal social order are obliged to reshuffle their disjointed selves, and are as a result considerably confused about their purposes, postmodernity comes to seem not a marvelous handmaiden to liberalism but the revelation of liberalism's fundamental conundrum.

Now many liberals will refuse to allow that liberalism has anything to do with all these cultural dilemmas. They will insist that liberalism bears no responsibility for the cultural confusions and incoherent identities of a postmodern age, but is concerned strictly with the self-moderating political institutions that mediate between the state and the citizen. However, this is not, I think, an adequate reply. As even some defenders of liberalism will readily admit, liberalism is a product, and functions as a theoretical articulation, of the inexorable process of modernization whereby individuals more and more rely on their own resources (however attenuated) in defining their place in the world. As one of these defenders of liberalism points out (in a formulation that critics of liberalism can scarcely refuse): "Liberalism holds out the promise, or the threat, of making all the world like California."²⁹ It is a measure of Rorty's value as a social theorist that he is aware that this "promise or threat" is what is at stake in his defense of a liberal public culture, and aware also that this has global implications for how a society defines itself. Rorty's error, however, is to think that this question concerning the worth of liberalism's contribution to the human good has already arrived at its outcome (by virtue of the historical development of a particular political community, a particular "we") in advance of theoretical contestation. In short, he thinks that history, by shaping a particular community until a cultural consensus evolves, decides issues

that philosophers would never be able to settle by the exercise of plain reason. Liberalism is worthy of our allegiance, not because the insights of philosophers assure us of its superiority, but because “we” have had the sort of shared history, shaped by contingencies, that makes it attractive to us. I hope that what I have said above concerning Rorty’s misjudgment in repudiating the “old-time philosophy” serves to make clear enough why I consider this conception a big mistake.

The Virtues and Vices of a Liberal Ironist

I began by reviewing some objections that had been made to Rorty’s antirealist critique of epistemology, and trying to show that his anti-realism has consequences that are no less troubling in the domain of political theory. Rorty’s philosophical sources are American pragmatism and French postmodernism, and from these sources he wishes to draw support for a political project of his own: an antifoundationalist defense of liberalism. While an alliance of pragmatism and liberalism is hardly novel, the alliance between postmodernism and liberalism is something rather new and unexpected. And yet, I want to suggest, this latter alliance is not as surprising as one might think. Postmodernism offers a kind of “hyperliberalism.” Thus Rorty, as a postmodern liberal, helps to draw out and hence clarify some of the more radical entailments that are implicit in conventional liberalism. Some earlier liberals, notably J. S. Mill, based their liberalism on a robust standard of individual self-development. This meant that one could still apply critical theoretical standards to render judgment on whether the shared way of life in which individuals participate under a liberal or liberalizing regime is spiritually dead or spiritually alive. What distinguishes contemporary liberalism of the Rawls-Dworkin-Ackerman vintage is the injunction against applying any theoretical standards, let alone a robust one, for fear of derogating from the “equal respect” owing to the moral choices of individuals, regardless of their content.³⁰ Despite the philosophical idiosyncrasies of his that I have surveyed in this essay, Rorty is a typical liberal in this respect, and the shallowness of the moral standard he applies to liberal society helps to illustrate the common failing of contemporary liberals.

A liberal society is a society chiefly dedicated to the protection of individual rights and liberties. A liberal theorist is an intellectual who is reluctant to cause liberal society to feel uneasy with itself by posing radical (i.e., tactless) questions about the real worth of the activities to

which individuals within such societies devote their main energies. (To clarify my usage: for my purposes, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor are "liberals" whereas Alasdair MacIntyre and Hannah Arendt are not.) The common thread joining the various versions of liberalism in our time is philosophical diffidence. This diffidence can take different forms, with different kinds of theoretical motivation: in utilitarian liberalism, it is sanctioned by the impulse not to impede the satisfaction of the wants and desires of all; for Kantian liberals, by the requirement to accord equal respect to all individuals (thus rigorously debarring one from raising questions about the equal legitimacy of the specific purposes elected by individuals); in the case of Rorty's pragmatist liberalism, by the urge for complete freedom in experimenting endlessly with a galaxy of social and cultural possibilities. To be sure, critical judgment is an impertinence, but the impertinence cannot be avoided since the alternative—taking the ends of our civilization to be beyond philosophical criticism—is an unacceptable price to pay for the wish not to appear illiberal. The real danger is that once the content of our social practices has been rendered immune to philosophical judgment, the moral autonomy affirmed by the second version of liberalism and the cultural freedom affirmed by the third version of liberalism will turn out in the end to be indistinguishable from the wants and desires affirmed in the first version of liberalism.

What I like most about Rorty is his puncturing of the presumption of theorists that they are, by their theorizing, helping to reorder the world.³¹ At the same time, I can well understand what it is that many theorists find so irritating about Rorty. It is his frequent tone of smug self-satisfaction—his "bourgeois aestheticism,"³² to apply a label he himself seems to invite. (That, at least, is the prevalent tone of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*; the tone is quite different in some of the essays, especially the one on Unger and Castoriadis in *EOH*, 177–92.) To be sure, in calling the regime that he celebrates that of the "rich democracies," there is a refreshing note of light self-mockery that is entirely absent from the more sober, less ironic theorizing of other liberals (like Rawls and Dworkin). Still, the predominant rhetoric in Rorty's writing is a political-intellectual bourgeois smugness: "Aren't the rich democracies wonderful, and wouldn't the world be wonderful if it were composed exclusively of rich democracies?" In my own work,³³ I adopt exactly the opposite rhetoric: "Aren't the rich democracies ghastly, and wouldn't the world be ghastly if it were composed exclusively of rich democracies?" The truth, of course (as Rorty no doubt realizes), lies somewhere between these two rhetorical ex-

tremes. But any kind of theorizing must make appeal to a certain rhetoric (here I agree *completely* with Rorty), and in order to have any force, such a rhetoric must move toward an extreme. Given the choice between these two opposing alternatives, I think the rhetoric I have chosen is more compelling, and moreover, I think that it is closer to the historic vocation of Western theorists from Socrates to Nietzsche. There is nothing more insufferable than a theorist who spends all his or her time saying how superior his or her own society is to every other society. (It is surprising that more theorists haven't found Rawlsian liberalism insufferable for this reason.) But again, Rorty, with his humor, his irony, his wit, is infinitely preferable to the more earnest self-congratulation of other liberals.

NOTES

1. Henry S. Kariel, "Nietzsche's Preface to Constitutionalism," *The Journal of Politics* 25, no. 2 (May 1963): 211-25. For a more recent attempt to "postmodernize" liberalism, turning both Nietzsche and Foucault into the sources of an improved liberal pluralism, see William E. Connolly, "Identity and Difference in Liberalism," in R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara, and Henry S. Richardson, eds., *Liberalism and the Good* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59-85.
2. For good examples of some standard lines of critique, see the chapters by Tom Sorell, Bernard Williams, and Charles Taylor in Alan R. Malachowski, ed., *Reading Rorty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 11-25, 26-37, and 257-75, respectively. It is a matter of some irritation in Rorty that even one of his ostensible allies in the war against "representationalism," namely Hilary Putnam, submits Rorty to a realist critique. See *ORT*, 24, and Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 216. This would seem to indicate that Rorty's antirealist rhetoric carries him rather farther than he realizes, or farther than he is prepared to acknowledge.
3. Rorty himself is emphatic in his denials that he is a relativist: *ORT*, 23-30, 38-39, 42-43, 49-51, 59, 66-67, 89, 202. My own view is that the problem of Rorty's "relativism" lies more in his use of a certain provocative rhetoric than in the substance of his views; however, he is sometimes willing to press this rhetoric far enough (e.g., *ORT*, 176-77, 187-88, 199-200, 207-8; *EOH*, 74-77, 168) that he trips himself up in needlessly counterproductive ways.
4. Late Rorty as opposed to early Rorty thinks that he can do without a substantive account of truth, so he drops his pragmatist truth-theory (*ORT*, 150 n 61), as he had been urged to do by Donald Davidson (*Reading*

Rorty, 136–38); but it is doubtful whether Rorty can avoid letting his pragmatist interpretation of truth sneak back in.

5. "The true" = "the expedient," according to a formula cited favorably by Rorty: *ORT*, 127. Cf. *EOH*, 2.
6. A typical Rortyan formulation is "success or failure" in "solving life's problems" (*ORT*, 66, 68).
7. So, for instance, in hermeneutics we have the seemingly self-evident view that interpretations are addressed to a text, whereas in deconstructionism we have the paradoxical view that interpretation is so all-pervasive that there is no separate "text" that constitutes a standard for weighing the plausibility of interpretations. Here, as one would expect, Rorty tends to side with the deconstructionists against the hermeneuticists: *ORT*, 88–89; *EOH*, 59 n 21, 115–16 ("regress of interpretation," "the endlessness of interpretation"), 125 ("endless sequence of recontextualizations"). The "aboutness" relation, whether for texts or for anything else, is precisely what Rorty has to find some way of circumventing: see *ORT*, 97–98; *EOH*, 38.
8. If what hangs upon the distinction is the idea that "we have to start from where we are," as he puts it in *ORT*, 29, well, it is hard to see that *anyone* has ever thought otherwise, *including Plato*.
9. Cf. *EOH*, 110, 113. Oddly enough, some of the points I make against Rorty in this essay are quite similar to points Rorty himself makes against Derrida in Part II of *EOH*.
10. See, for instance, *ORT*, 46–62, 109–110, 116.
11. Rorty vigorously resists this opposing strategy in *ORT*, 162–63.
12. Rorty is aware that there is an army of critics lying in wait longing to catch him in a "self-referential paradox" (*ORT*, 192), and that he has to keep hopping if he is to avoid getting caught in one. (Cf. *EOH*, 94).
13. Cf. *EOH*, 154, 193–98.
14. Tom Sorell, "The World from its Own Point of View," in *Reading Rorty*, 22.
15. For a very insightful exploration of such tensions in Rorty's political thought, see Nancy Fraser, "Solidarity or Singularity?" in *Reading Rorty*, 303–21.
16. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xv, 74, 146. For a good summary of Shklar's liberalism, see Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed., *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21–38.
17. Richard Rorty, "That Old-Time Philosophy," *The New Republic*, April 4, 1988: 28–33.
18. I should emphasize that I regard complaints from those on the left about Rorty's "conservatism" as entirely unfair, for as his political writings in response to those complaints have made amply clear, his basic contentment with bourgeois liberalism as a way of life has not blunted his sense of the urgent need for egalitarian reforms. Politically, he seems strongly

committed to a left-liberal or social-democratic agenda for pursuing such reforms. Satisfaction with the general shape of a social order does not preclude being sharply critical of the specific practices of that social order's ruling class. The "liberal complacency" at issue here refers to a spiritual-philosophical stance toward modern life, not a full endorsement of the status quo. (What I mean by "a spiritual-philosophical stance" toward modernity comes out clearly enough in Rorty's response to MacIntyre in *EOH*, 158–61.) In "For a More Banal Politics," *Harper's*, May 1992: 16–21, Rorty classifies himself as a leftist intellectual.

19. But note Rorty's disclaimer in *EOH*, 1–2.
20. J.G.A. Pocock, "The Ideal of Citizenship Since Classical Times," *Queen's Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 51.
21. *Ibid.*
22. For a comprehensive elaboration of this view of the self, see "Freud and Moral Reflection," *EOH*, 143–63—perhaps the most important piece in these two volumes of philosophical papers. While Rorty claims that maturity of the self consists "in an ability to seek out new redescriptions," he offers no hint as to how the never-ending process of revising vocabularies will help to produce, as he also claims, "a genuinely stable character in an unstable time" (*ibid.*, 152–53).
23. Thomas L. Pangle, *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 58.
24. As discussed above, Rorty wishes to keep sharply distinct the rules of public justice relevant to the citizen and the intellectual's unruly quest for self-perfection, which is to be rigorously privatized. But since postmodernism excels at subverting boundaries, why shouldn't some of the aestheticism proper to the cultural sphere seep over the boundary into the political sphere? For Rorty's answer to this worry, see *ORT*, 193–94.
25. In *ORT*, 44, Rorty tries to reorient the purpose of intellectual activity from "getting it right" to "making it new." But if novelty is the supreme standard, enemies of liberalism, provided that their versions of illiberalism are sufficiently novel, would count as exemplars of Rorty's new intellectual culture.
26. See *EOH*, 160.
27. Generally speaking, Rorty tends to portray postmodernism as a fairly innocuous cultural tendency—a badge that a political liberal can without much hesitation pin to his or her lapel. Within Rorty's theoretical landscape, pragmatism and postmodernism approach synonymity; thus he refers to Dewey as "a postmodernist before his time" (*ORT*, 201). Yet it is interesting that when he comes face-to-face with a real postmodernist, namely, in his debate with Lyotard (*ORT*, 211–22), Rorty suddenly begins to sound surprisingly like Habermas, emphasizing universal consensus, and trading in his proudly advertised ethnocentrism for cosmopolitanism.

This might suggest that Rorty phrases his liberalism in terms borrowed from an illiberal quarter with an eye to rhetorical impact.

28. For a similar analysis, see Charles B. Guignon and David R. Hiley's critique of Rorty in *Reading Rorty*, 355–61.
29. Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 278.
30. In order to bring out the contrast between the older self-developmental liberalism and modern lowest-common-denominator liberalism, one might compare T. H. Green's statement (*Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* [London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941], 177–78) that "the better organisation of the state means freer scope to the individual (not necessarily to do as he likes, e.g. in the buying and selling of alcohol, but in such development of activity as is good on the whole)" with Isaiah Berlin's statement that liberals "wish the frontiers between individuals or groups of men to be drawn solely with a view of preventing collisions between human purposes, all of which must be considered to be equally ultimate, uncriticizable ends in themselves" (*Four Essays on Liberty* [London: Oxford University Press, 1969], 153 n).
31. For an excellent statement of how little philosophers have to contribute, politically speaking, see *EOH*, 24–26. See also *EOH*, 120, 133–37, 190–92, as well as Rorty's marvelous essay, "Thugs and Theorists," *Political Theory* 15, no. 4 (November 1987): 564–80.
32. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (141–68), Rorty offers a chapter on Nabokov (a writer who supposedly prides himself on his aestheticism) that is actually a critique of aestheticism. His argument is that Nabokov cannot be a consistent aesthete because his art serves moral purposes that are inseparable from the artistic effect that he is seeking to achieve with his novels. Rorty also argues, contrary to what most philosophers have assumed, that what the novelist does serves a more public (social and political) function than what the philosopher does (which is more geared to self-creation or self-perfection). Therefore it is easier for the philosopher to be a pure aesthete, because what he or she does is more private, than it is for the novelist. This argument is continued in a lively essay on "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" in *EOH*, 66–82.
33. See my *What's the Matter with Liberalism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

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RICHARD RORTY'S POLITICS

The training and experience of such academic philosophers as Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam do not equip them with the economic and other social-scientific tools necessary to make useful contributions to political discussion. In the case of Rorty, this has resulted in his being unable to make effective ripostes to left-wing critics of his defense of "bourgeois liberalism," his uncritical endorsement of simplistic arguments for social reform, and his embrace of false prophecies of doom, such as those found in Orwell's novel Nineteen Eighty-Four. Moreover, his disdain for "theory" has blinded him to the utility of mid-level theories, such as those of economics, in dealing with concrete social problems.

Richard Rorty must be doing something right, because he's anathema to both Left and Right. To the Left he is an apologist for "cold-war liberalism" and "bourgeois capitalist democracy"; to the Right, a philosophical termite gnawing at the foundations of Western civilization, and a cheerleader for left-wing radicals, such as Roberto Unger and Catharine MacKinnon. He is all these things in a sense, but his work is a unity, as I shall suggest, and an impressive one. It has a weakness, though: a deficient sense of fact, which is related to Rorty's lack of interest in science, and therefore in social science, and therefore in

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economics; a weakness related, as well, to his belief in the plasticity of human nature. It is a weakness that calls into question the capacity of academic philosophy to make concrete contributions to contemporary politics and policy—a point I shall further illustrate with reference to a recent book by another distinguished pragmatist philosopher, Hilary Putnam.

Philosophy and Policy

Academic philosophers like Rorty and Putnam, and their critics within philosophy, are people whose professional competence is centered on two activities. The first is the interpretation, elaboration, and criticism of philosophical texts—canonical older texts from Plato to Wittgenstein, plus the books and articles being ground out at a frightening rate by members of present-day university departments of philosophy. The second activity, which is closely related, is the use of the tools of logic and rhetoric to address problems set by the authors of the canonical texts—the problems of skepticism and free will and so on. It was not always thus. Plato and Aristotle were not primarily either exegetes or technical analysts. Nor for that matter was Nietzsche (whom many analytical philosophers, however, would like to expel from the philosophical canon). Nor (in part anyway) was Wittgenstein, especially the later Wittgenstein.¹ But it is largely true today. And neither the canon, nor its modern elaboration, has much to say about any specific political, social, or economic problems. I emphasize “specific.” I do not wish to disparage the body of philosophical literature. It contains striking insights into human personality and the human dilemma. It challenges dogma, by insisting that we try to justify even our deepest personal and professional beliefs. It dispels, or can be used to dispel, linguistic confusions that muddy our thinking about things (or rather no-things) like “causation” and “free will.” It is a source of our society’s basic political and moral ideas. It offers examples—not limited to Socrates—of intellectual and moral courage of a high order. Immersion in the canonical texts of philosophy cannot fail to affect one’s thinking in profound ways; the impact of pragmatism on the legal and judicial writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes is a good example.

But none of these concessions—intended in no grudging spirit—to philosophy’s importance implies that philosophical texts can fruitfully be mined for *specific* answers to today’s *specific* problems of social governance. The compartmentalization of knowledge—so prominent a

feature of the modern world—may have condemned philosophy to irrelevance at the level of practice. Rorty knows this;² in fact said it long before I; but he has yet to suit his actions to his words. For an implication of those words is that Rorty, save as he may wish to disclaim the title “philosopher,” should be silent (in public) on practical issues—whether the economic organization of backward countries, or national health insurance, or subsidized day care, or legal restrictions on abortion—except when the people who debate these issues on the basis of their expert knowledge try to bolster their positions with philosophical arguments. Philosophers are expert (none more so than Rorty) at batting down philosophical arguments, just as lawyers are expert at batting down legal arguments. Neither philosophers nor lawyers, however, have by virtue of their professional training and experience the wherewithal to make informed pronouncements concerning the substance of social policy.³ Everyone has the right as a citizen to pronounce on issues of social policy. But philosophers, as distinct from physicians, public health professionals, physicists, economists, engineers, military officers, social workers, architects, and other professionals having relevant expertise to particular issues of policy, have no greater right. Rorty, it is true, does not flaunt the title “philosopher”; far from it—he is the philosopher as antiphilosopher. But were he not a famous philosopher, no one would be interested in his views on public policy; he would have no market.

Before proceeding further, I offer four qualifications to stave off charges of philistinism. The first is that many, perhaps most, philosophers revel in the uselessness of their field. One of them has remarked that use and value are inversely related, that philosophy is useless, and that a proper qualifying examination for graduate work in philosophy would consist entirely of jokes.⁴ Second, in speaking of the central and “useless” philosophical canon I mean to exclude works that while philosophical in character could as well be classified as works of practical political theory—works by Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. To me, more pertinently to Rorty, the canon consists of works (some of course by Aristotle and Locke) that explore such “fundamental,” though some might think them more properly described as linguistic, problems as the nature of mind, will, and perception; the conditions of personal identity; the logic of mathematics; the reality of the external world; the warrants of true belief; the nature of rationality; the difference between things and concepts; the nature of science; and the objectivity of morals.

Third, many philosophers have additional training or experience

that they can use to address policy issues constructively. Foucault's magnificent *History of Sexuality* illustrates this point. In preparation for writing it, he read deeply in what is a predominantly nonphilosophical literature on sexuality. John Dewey's writings on education are an older example of a philosopher's contributing to practical life. But knowledge was less compartmentalized when he wrote, and a philosopher today is unlikely to get tenure by writing outside his field. Ronald Dworkin is at once a distinguished philosopher and an influential commentator on legal questions, but he was trained as a lawyer. Mill was an economist as well as a philosopher, and Bentham a lawyer and an economist. And again, the latter two predate the modern compartmentalization of knowledge.

Fourth, though related to my earlier observation that immersion in the canon is bound to affect one's thinking, the classical texts can open up vistas of concern even when they cannot generate specific policies. John Rawls's already classic theory of justice illustrates this point as well as point two (political theory). Although, like utilitarianism, Rawls's theory operates at a level of abstraction that has allowed both socialists and libertarians to cite it in support of their positions on practical questions, and although one would hardly go to Rawls for advice on such questions—on workfare or the voucher system or rent supplements or gun control or the savings and loans debacle or whatever—his theory has made the issue of equality central for many practical thinkers.

Two Cheers for Rorty

Enough background. On to Rorty—acute, tenacious, and seductively lucid critic of the central philosophical tradition of the West. In this tradition, which stems from Plato, human reason is seen as engaged in an ever more successful quest to find the permanent, the ultimate, the invisible, but the thoroughly objective and knowable, truths that lie behind appearances—scientific truths, of course, but also moral and legal and political (and in some versions theological) ones, and perhaps even truth's aesthetic counterpart, beauty. In each area of inquiry the quest is seen as centripetal, because the inquirers are believed to be converging on a uniform reality which, though hidden, acts as a magnet to curious humans. That ultimate reality—God in some formulations, the scientific view of the universe in others—provides the ground and benchmark for all our investigations and discussions. It

allows us (in principle) to determine once and for all that the universe is billions rather than thousands of years old, that public school segregation violates the equal protection of the laws, that William Faulkner is a better writer than Margaret Mitchell, that peace is better than war, and that democracy is a better system of government than National Socialism. These are all things that most of us believe, and we would like to think that we believe them because they are true, that is, because they correspond to the way things are—that they are not just local prejudices, the product of our upbringing and culture, our limited perspectives.

Rorty doesn't think the things we deeply believe we believe because they are so;⁵ rather, we believe them because they fit in nicely with our way of looking at things, our other beliefs. Two hundred years ago Negro slavery, though already controversial, nested comfortably in a system of beliefs having to do with the origins of and differences among races. We have other beliefs about these things today, with which slavery doesn't fit, and it has become anathema. Not because slavery "really" is wrong; there's no really about the matter if "really" is taken to point to some universal reality that provides "objective" (not local, not space- or time-bound) criteria for moral judgments. It just doesn't mesh with our current belief system, which includes a belief in racial equality held as dogmatically (though secretly doubted by many of its holders) as our ancestors held their belief in racial inequality. Rorty would, I think, be willing to take the next step and concede that this belief system was affected by the changing economic value of slavery and also that we continue to condone "slavery" by another name in a variety of settings including prisons and the nursery. Similarly, until Copernicus's time and indeed somewhat later, the heliocentric conception of the universe had no utility, so the issue of its truth didn't arise; perhaps some day that conception will again have no utility and be abandoned.

This position is not the sort of free-range relativism that supposes that belief in slavery or in the geocentric picture of the universe are options in our belief system, which they are not. It is a mistake to suppose that only proven or tautological propositions are held unshakably; our most unshakable beliefs, as Wittgenstein memorably showed, are in fact intuitive. But since there is no convergence on ultimate reality (because there is no ultimate reality conveniently accessible to human intelligence)—since, therefore, our thinking is relative to our position (nation, class, gender, race, etc.)—progress, if one can call it that, does not come through either a parade-ground march

on the boulevard of truth or sudden breakthroughs to the truth. It comes through shifts in perspective, changes in the ground from which we view the world. This is the kind of thing that happened when Copernicus decided to make the sun the center of the solar system, in place of the earth, or when Bentham proposed that animals had moral claims because they could experience pain. The basic political task, therefore, in Rorty's view, is to create a social framework that, by the cultivation of tolerance and the legal protection of diversity and debate, encourages geniuses, like Copernicus and Bentham, Christ and Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, Dickens and Orwell, who are able through the deployment of powerful metaphors (such as "gravity" or "id" or "Scrooge" or "Big Brother") and other redescrptions to shatter our dogmas (though perhaps erecting new ones in their place), enrich our sense of possibility, add to our repertoire of techniques for controlling the physical and social environment, broaden our sympathies. The political system that places tolerance and diversity front and center is liberalism, because the liberal state is neutral about substantive values. It insists only on the procedural values, such as the protection of privacy and freedom of belief and speech and occupation, that are necessary to secure diversity of belief, expression, and ways of life.

All this seems to me basically sound. It is the generalization to the sphere of politics of the "fallibilist" vein in the philosophy of science. Fallibilists, such as Mill and Peirce, Dewey and Popper, emphasize scientific procedures and values rather than scientific truth—the process rather than the goal. The scientist is the inquirer who, disdainful of enlisting the power of the state to enforce agreement with his views—to obtain, in Justice Robert Jackson's striking phrase, the unanimity of the graveyard—offers those views to a community of inquirers in a form that makes them readily refutable if they are false. And the process of falsification results in a shifting of perspectives, each of which leaves a deposit in a growing repository of knowledge.

Admittedly, this conception of the process of scientific inquiry is not entirely consistent with Rorty's approach. To speak of knowledge is to speak of truth, and it is difficult to understand the growth of scientific knowledge—practical knowledge, embodied in technology and institutions, not the speculative sort of knowledge associated with efforts to determine the age of the universe—without supposing that science enables us to get in touch with things as they are, including some invisible entities, such as atoms and molecules, that exist and are not merely artifacts of theory. Yet false theories, such as Ptolemy's geocentric theory of the universe, can yield real knowledge, for example how

to navigate by the stars, while theories themselves, though falsifiable, can never be shown to be true but can only be shown to be useful. So the fallibilist approach to science does shift the emphasis away from truth, although it does not dispense with it entirely. And when fallibilist procedures are transferred to the political and legal and moral spheres, the sense in which inquiry can be said to teach us how things really stand becomes severely attenuated, and we can only hope that through the conflict and comparison and succession of theories we will become better and wiser and happier. The peculiar aptness of Rorty's brand of fallibilism and antifoundationalism to legal theory may explain why, according to a quick check of the Lexis Law Review database, academic lawyers cite Rorty more often than they cite any other living philosophers except Rawls and Nozick (and of course Dworkin, but he's a special case).

Of course, as Rorty sometimes fails to remind us, experimentalism should not be fostered without any regard for its costs. The Nazi experiment in political theory taught us a lot, but one would have to be awfully curious to think the cost worth the benefit. No doubt we would learn a lot from reintroducing slavery, or adopting the Islamic system of criminal punishments, or breeding people as we do dogs. Challenging dogmas, including dogmas like freedom and humanity, is fine, but it is not a good of infinite value. It must be traded off against other valuable goods, such as life, liberty, happiness, and social stability. Liberalism is not anarchy or license.

The epistemological defense of (constrained) liberalism that I am sketching, which resembles Justice Holmes's defense of free speech (the resemblance is no accident, in light of Holmes's personal association with pragmatism's founders, Peirce and James), has been subjected to a variety of criticisms. The main ones are three. The first, which is made by philosophical realists and Catholics, among many others, and which I shall not try to discuss because it belongs to the domain of indeterminate high theory, is that there really are objective truths, about science or morality or politics or law, which we can find by the light of reason. The second criticism, which has been made by Alasdair MacIntyre,⁶ is that unless a society insists on some basic uniformity of outlook, disagreements will not be resolvable by reasoned debate akin to scientific inquiry, because the disputants won't be standing on common ground. That is possible but fortunately is not the situation in the United States, as MacIntyre mistakenly believes. For example, it is true that the hard core of fundamentalist anti-abortionists and the hard core of feminist supporters of abortion on

demand inhabit different moral universes, much as the abolitionists and slave owners did. It is no accident that each side of the abortion debate uses abolitionist rhetoric and by doing so asserts an unbridgeable moral gulf between it and the other side. But neither side is politically dominant. So each tries to appeal to a middle group, which it can do only by finding a common ground with that group. The abortion controversy will ultimately be resolved—if it is ever resolved⁷—by the people who, occupying a patch of common ground with both extreme groups—seeing the objections to abortion on demand, on the one hand, and to the criminalization of abortion on the other—are able to make a reasoned or at least reasonable choice between them.

The third criticism of Rorty's position, which is made by radical feminists and other left wingers, is that liberalism is not in fact neutral. It biases debate, for example by allowing some people to amass huge fortunes that they can use to manipulate public opinion and consigning others to poverty and silence, as by forcing women into subordinate positions in household and market. While there is nothing in liberalism to preclude tolerating such biases, the particular empirical claim is false. Although the mass media in this country are largely owned by huge corporations and wealthy individuals, not only their reporters and newscasters but even most of their editorial and feature writers are well to the left of center and are vociferous critics of wealthy people, huge corporations, bourgeois liberalism, and conservative values. The spokesmen for women and oppressed minorities have achieved positions of influence and high visibility in the universities, the media, and politics. Far from being silenced, they are courted by the most powerful communicative institutions in the nation, and they have succeeded in silencing a number of their timid critics in those institutions. (Who but I dares use the word "spokesman"?) The strongest, and loudest, criticisms of bourgeois democracy, liberal capitalism, free markets, consumerism, Western political and aesthetic values, patriarchy, heterosexism, the rich, the treatment of blacks and other minority persons, and everything else of which left-leaning radicals disapprove are heard not in the handful of countries that remain socialist in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, but in the United States. Inequality of income and wealth does not, in fact, silence debate.

In Defense of Theories

I have argued that two major criticisms of Rorty's position—that there isn't enough consensus in our society to permit a rational choice among competing moral or political perspectives and that liberalism silences its critics—are factually incorrect. One might have expected Rorty to say so. He hasn't. He agrees with his critics that there are radical flaws in bourgeois democracy—flaws so deep and wide as to warrant despair, leading him to say, for example, that “if there is hope, it lies in the Third World.”⁸ I expect that few people in the Third World would agree with that statement. Many of them would say that if there is hope for the Third World it lies in the speedy emulation of Western political and economic institutions—particularly capitalism and its institutional preconditions, namely property rights and the rule of law. The very term “Third World” may soon be an anachronism. As China and India and the nations of Latin America unburden their economies of state control (the nations of East Asia other than China having already, to a great extent, done so), “Third World” is on the way to becoming a synonym for Africa. Yet in 1988, with socialism everywhere in shambles, we find Rorty, in the same article, hoping that “that somewhere someday, the newly-elected government of a large industrialized society [such as Brazil would] decree that everybody would get the same income, regardless of occupation or disability.”⁹ This particular experiment has already been tried repeatedly, in the Third World and elsewhere, beginning with the earliest period of Soviet Communism, and has always failed.¹⁰ It is time to stop urging it on the very countries that would be most harmed by it. Social experimentation should neither be thought costless nor always cost-justified.

Writing just four years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Rorty told us that “time seems to be on the Soviet side,” while denouncing as a “gang of thugs” “the shadowy millionaires manipulating Reagan.”¹¹ Such statements put one in mind of the imaginary world inhabited by Rorty's left-wing critics, such as Jo Burrows, who in an essay published only three years ago suggested that the international economic system may be unfairly stacked against the Soviet Union, who saw Sandinista Nicaragua as a locus of non-Marxist social and democratic reforms, who thinks poor countries can only “break into Northern monopolies” by “keeping skilled workers in the country” (the Berlin Wall?) and by “discouraging cash crops that may only

benefit the rich" (discouraging exports?), who declared liberal doctrine "outdated" and that we need "an entirely new political system which accommodates East and West, North and South," and who criticized Rorty for ignoring "pragmatic socialist alternatives which have been worked out in the Frankfurt critical studies movement."¹² This is the Left's clichéd dream world, and you don't awaken from it by reading Rorty's favorite writers, whether Nietzsche or Derrida, Sartre or Heidegger, Orwell or Nabokov. Some of these are great thinkers, but they have no more to contribute to solving the problems of the modern world than Praxiteles or Wagner does.

I do not criticize Rorty for failing to foresee the fall of Communism; no one else did. And despite the emotional pull that the dreams of the left appear to exert upon him, he has shown much more sense than those who clung for so long to faith in Communism, if not in the Soviet Union then in China, if not in China then in Cuba, if not in Cuba then in East Germany. His recent essay on intellectuals in politics¹³ is a courageous attack on the cult of political correctness and on the radical leftism of contemporary English departments. Nor do I disparage Rorty's defense of the "edifying" as distinct from the analytical tradition in philosophy, the former including such figures as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Derrida. Rorty helps us see that the first two can be saved from the charge of reactionary politics by reconceiving their projects as personal rather than political or metaphysical—by seeing that, like Freud, they have valuable things to say about how we should live our personal lives, how (Nietzsche is particularly valuable here) we can take control of our lives. All of which is entirely compatible with, perhaps indeed enabled by, bourgeois liberalism, which creates the opportunities for individual experiments in living while the edifying thinkers are busy designing the experiments themselves. But it is remote from specific social problems and useless for their solution.

A solid grasp of social science, signally including economics and applied statistics, is required not only to propose intelligent solutions to the problems of rich liberal countries but even to recognize what those problems are—to distinguish them, in other words, from pseudoproblems. It is not clear, for example, that rich nations exploit poor ones, that either the federal budget deficit or Japanese competition is a truly grave problem for the United States (the latter is not a problem at all), that AIDS represents a grave social crisis for this country rather than an ugly, dangerous, but fairly easily controlled and only moderately expensive disease, that the total amount of money we

are spending on health care is excessive although the allocation among patients may be distorted, that the shift of employment from manufacturing to services is a problem, that the savings and loan debacle is anything more than the predictable harvest of unsound New Deal banking regulations, that the social problem of drug addiction is more than an artifact of foolish efforts to solve it (just like the alcohol problem during Prohibition), that income and wealth are too unequally distributed, that the American educational system taken as a whole is either markedly inferior to the educational systems of the other wealthy countries or starved for resources, or that our physical infrastructure is disintegrating. I do not think that we should regret the decline of labor unions any more than we should regret the decline of those other industrial dinosaurs, the Detroit automakers.

If economists no longer subscribe to Malthusian pessimism, neither are they Pollyannas. They recognize that this country has serious problems, some arising from the deep black-white gulf, some from anachronistic moral views about nonmarital sex and mind-altering drugs that are held by the respectable elements in the society, and many from unsound public policies procured by political pressure groups constituted of dairy farmers, automobile manufacturers, pharmacists, and the elderly, but none of them rooted in capitalism or liberalism. The federal government spends too much, though whether it finances its extravagances through borrowing, printing money, or taxing may be largely a detail.

I would not be surprised to turn out to be wrong in my evaluations of these problems and (as many of them seem to me to be) pseudoproblems. But I am confident that all of them present difficult analytical and empirical issues that can no more be understood, let alone resolved, with only the help of the intuitions and analytic procedures of persons trained in the humanities than problems in high-energy physics or brain surgery can be understood and resolved by close study of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. It may be that they can't be solved at all, that we must simply live with them, but that is a separate question.

To Rorty, however, the theories of economics or sociology or public choice that might be brought to bear on America's social problems are just—theory. And he is against theory. But there are theories and there are theories. Just because deconstruction or postmodernist theories of oppression or feminist theories of phallocentrism or neo-Austrian theories of anarcho-capitalism are useless for solving practical social problems of the here and now, it does not follow that no theories are

useful for that purpose. Take economic theory, which is what I know best. I agree that economics has no cogent theory of distributive justice, but it has a lot to say about the consequences of policies ostensibly designed to make the distribution of income and wealth more equal. A mountain of theoretical and empirical work on the consequences of rent control and public housing and the progressive income tax and health insurance and voucher systems and the negative income tax provides the indispensable factual predicate for informed analysis of redistributive policies.

Rorty disagrees. He thinks that all we need to understand our social problems is a muckraking journalist's vocabulary that will equip us to talk about the rich ripping off the poor, the strong trampling on the weak, the excessive greed of the upper class, the selfish indifference of the middle class, the control of government and the media by thugs and millionaires. This is an impoverished vocabulary for the description and solution of our social problems. Those problems *may* result from string pulling or bad character or monopoly or concentrations of wealth—or they may be inherent features of modernity, or remediable or irremediable consequences of the friction between capitalism and democracy. These are studiable, empirical issues. The necessary inquiry should not be short-circuited by a vocabulary that commits the inquirer in advance. Even if there are no deep, metaphysical realities of the sort that religious and philosophical thinkers in the central tradition of Western thought long believed, it does not follow that a shallow antinomianism is all we are left with. The utility of mid-level social scientific theories and empirical methodologies is independent of their metaphysical foundations, if any.

The better journalists, though handicapped by lack of relevant education, attempt to study the problems they write about. I see no evidence that Rorty—or his critics on the left—have studied any of the political or social or economic problems about which they write, whether it is the foreign policy of the United States or the role of millionaires in the policies of the Reagan administration. I see no evidence that they even regard these as studiable problems, though the best example of this happens to be found not in work by or criticizing Rorty but rather in a recent book of the versatile and distinguished Harvard philosopher Hilary Putnam. Putnam is best known among philosophers for his work in mathematical logic and the philosophy of language, mind, mathematics, and physics. If there is anything more remote from, say, American policy toward South America than Derrida's *On Grammatology* (to take only his most lucid work), it is the

highly technical branches of logic and philosophy in which Putnam has specialized. But like another Cambridge polymath, Noam Chomsky, Putnam has strong views on our policy toward Latin America. *Realism with a Human Face*, published in 1990, contains an essay (Chapter 12, "How Not to Solve Ethical Problems") in which Putnam denounces the imagined policy of Republican administrations of imposing dictatorships on Latin American nations. The essay was originally delivered as a lecture in 1983, and apparently it did not occur to Putnam when recycling the lecture for publication in 1990 to examine the political history of the region since 1983. Had he done so he would have discovered that during the Reagan and Bush administrations every dictator or junta in Latin America, except of course Castro—whom I daresay Putnam once admired—had left or been kicked out by one means or another and been replaced by a reasonable simulacrum of democracy,¹⁴ that one after another these nations had dropped their traditional resentment of the United States and were busy imitating its economic as well as its political institutions, and that this turn to free markets, free trade, private ownership of the means of production, and free elections, in short to the despised bourgeois democratic model, seemed to be bringing prosperity within reach of these impoverished nations. I do not suggest that the Republicans deserve credit for this, or that any U.S. government has ever made much effort to promote democracy and prosperity in Latin America. I am merely questioning whether Putnam knows what happened there during the 1980s.

Putnam also says in this unintentionally self-referentially titled chapter that he is not an economist, but he then goes on to opine on the problem of unemployment in the United States. Again the discussion is stale, as he is wringing his hands over the unemployment rate in 1982—10 percent, which is shocking enough but hasn't been seen since, as he neglects to inform the reader. Putnam apologizes for having twice in his life succumbed to the siren song of Marxism but is not sufficiently chastened by the experience to withhold public comment on matters remote from his competence. He puts one in mind of another great logician who liked to express himself on quotidian political issues: Bertrand Russell.¹⁵

Severely academic philosophers such as Rorty and Putnam are most profitably employed when making and refuting arguments based on the texts of which they are the expert students and critics. Rorty is operating well within the circle of his competence when he points out that demolishing the traditional philosophical foundations of liberal-

ism does not demolish liberalism as a theory (no philosopher is going to have much success trying to demolish so successful a practice), because there is a perfectly good nonfoundational epistemological argument for liberalism, rooted in the nonfoundational philosophical analytics of Mill, of Peirce and Popper, and of James and Wittgenstein. But when Rorty prophesies the triumph of Soviet Communism or the coming of a Third World Messiah, he is talking about matters that he has never studied, matters for the study of which he has (I believe) never attempted to obtain the necessary intellectual tools. Although he has praised scientists for their tradition of disinterested, systematic, fact-based inquiry, he has not approached political questions in a scientific spirit.

One more example. Rorty's recent book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* contains an excellent discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.¹⁶ It is a first-rate piece of literary criticism. But it has one curious feature. It accepts as true the aspect of the novel that by 1989 history had falsified: its speculation about the kind of world that we might be inhabiting in the 1980s. Rorty writes, "Sometimes things prove to be just as bad as they first looked. Orwell helps us to formulate a pessimistic description of the political situation which forty years of further experience have only confirmed."¹⁷ What forty years actually show is that Orwell overestimated the power of government to brainwash a population. In 1989—the year the Berlin Wall was torn down and two years before the dissolution of the Soviet Union—it should have been evident that decades of Communist indoctrination had had only a superficial impact on the fundamental attitudes, values, beliefs, and preferences of the inhabitants of the Communist states, including those who had been born—indeed whose parents had been born—under Communism. When the lid was removed, the old loves, hates, prejudices, and superstitions once again boiled over. The significance of television had turned out to be not, as Orwell had expected, as a medium of surveillance, but as a medium of worldwide communication that prevented Communist governments from shutting their people off from the essential truth about the West—that its inhabitants were freer, healthier, more prosperous. The only minds permanently bent by communism were those of intellectuals.

Rorty knows all this but resists the implications because he believes that people are highly malleable by political and economic elites,¹⁸ perhaps highly malleable, period.¹⁹ That belief is, to repeat, a false correlate of his rejection of foundationalism. People seem to be (not invariably of course) highly resistant to the manipulative efforts of

leaders and planners, whether benignly or malignantly motivated. One doesn't have to subscribe to metaphysical notions about "human nature" of the sort that Rorty would properly deride²⁰ to build up from history and economics and psychology and genetics a picture of human behavior and capacities that makes both Winston and O'Brien unrealistic creations. Average people are not quite so sheeplike as Orwell thought, nor political elites quite so efficient. People are not the pliant tools of propaganda ministries, advertisers, or self-appointed religious or cultural elites. I do not mean that people are incapable of great cruelty, violence, and stupidity, or immune to the appeal of political Pied Pipers. I mean that their minds cannot be bent by the modern state or big business or the media with the ease that Orwell and Rorty, the latter with less excuse because he has the experience of an additional four decades, have supposed.

Political speculation constitutes a very small part of Rorty's output and, although linked as I have tried to show to basic features of his thought, is detachable from it. But the political Rorty has needlessly estranged the philosophical Rorty from parts of his audience—oddly enough on both ends of the political spectrum, but I am thinking particularly of people who, partly through the example of Rorty himself with his fulsome praise of Unger and MacKinnon, have succumbed to the fallacious view that pragmatism is a left-wing philosophy formed to engender doubt about the foundations of the Western tradition in science, law, politics, and morality. Pragmatism is formed to engender doubt about all philosophical foundations, but not necessarily in order to upset the practices that appear to rest on them—rather to show that they do not rest on them, that their validity depends on their consequences rather than on their having foundations—that the building metaphor is unhelpful and misleading when transposed from the construction of buildings to the justification of social institutions. (So I think Rorty has made a philosophical mistake in supporting, as a corollary of pragmatism, Unger's illiberal affection for proposals to smash, through such devices as "a government department of destabilization," established practices that include such constitutive institutions of liberalism as property.) Pragmatism engages the clutch that disconnects the whirring machinery of philosophical abstraction from the practical business of governing our lives and our societies. It seeks to free us from preconceptions based on "philosophical" thinking. This important message is obscured when the best-known living philosopher of pragmatism offers us, however occasionally and offhandedly, tired clichés about the Third World and

the Reagan millionaires, reflecting preconceptions as frail, arbitrary, and unexamined as any that support the edifice of conventional philosophizing.

NOTES

1. Though exegesis plays a role, for example in *On Certainty*, which is in part a critique of G. E. Moore's argument against skepticism.
2. "Don't assume that because we are philosophers we can be of any special use, in our professional capacity, to struggles against imperialism, or racism." Richard Rorty, "Truth and Freedom: A Reply to Thomas McCarthy," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 633, 641.
3. Excluding, in the case of lawyers, subjects such as tort reform that are deeply entangled in legal technicalities, though even here the proper role of lawyers is limited.
4. Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 292 n, 297.
5. See, e.g., Rorty, n 2 above, at 637: "I have always (well, not always, but for the last twenty years or so) been puzzled about what was supposed to count as a knockdown answer to Hitler."
6. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Arguments and Social Contexts: A Response to Rorty," in Robert Hollinger, ed., *Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 222.
7. Maybe it will be abandoned, or forgotten, or simmer at a low heat forever like the controversy over whether people have souls that survive the death of the body. A society needn't spin apart for lack of normative consensus.
8. Richard Rorty, "Unger, Castoriadis, and the Romance of a National Future," *Northwestern University Law Review* 82 (1988): 335, 340.
9. *Ibid.*, 349.
10. E.g., Peter J. Boettke, "The Soviet Experiment with Pure Communism," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 149-92.
11. Richard Rorty, "Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein," *Political Quarterly* 15 (1987): 564, 566-67. More recently he has written ominously about "developments [in this country] reminiscent of Weimar," and asserted "that Republicans have spent 12 years looting the country, and that the blue-collar voters have apparently turned their backs on liberal Democrats once and for all." "The Feminist Saving Remnant," *New Leader*, June 1-15, 1992: 9, 10.
12. Jo Burrows, "Conversational Politics: Rorty's Pragmatist Apology for Liberalism," in Alan R. Malachowski, ed., *Reading Rorty: Critical Responses to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (and Beyond)* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 322, 337-38 nn 27-28.

13. Richard Rorty, "Intellectuals in Politics: Too Far In? Too Far Out?" *Dissent* (Fall 1991): 483–490.
14. Maybe "every" is too strong; there has been backsliding to dictatorship in Haiti and Peru, though I am not aware of anyone who blames the United States for these developments.
15. By way of a grace note to Putnam on South American politics, I quote the following passage from Rorty's 1988 article on Roberto Unger: Brazil "cannot hope to achieve what the North Atlantic has achieved in the way of equality and decency by the same means: reliance on a free market in capital and on compromises between pressure groups" (n 8 above, at 339). Why not?
16. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 8.
17. *Ibid.*, 182.
18. Or so he believed in 1989. Events since then in the former Communist world may have altered his belief in Orwell's prophetic powers.
19. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, the sexual instinct is offered as an example of malleability. I find that very odd (n15 above, at 187).
20. "There is no such thing as human nature in the deep sense in which Plato and Strauss use this term." "Education, Socialization, & Individuation," *Liberal Education* 75 (Sept./Oct. 1989): 2, 5.

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HAYEK REVISITED

F. A. Hayek's contributions to a variety of disciplines were decisively influenced by his career as an economist, running from early work in capital theory and business cycles to the economics of socialism and neo-Austrian theories of competition. After reviewing his battle with Keynesian economics, this essay examines the socialist calculation debate, which altered Hayek's views of the central task of economics and led to a definite but disguised break with the views of Ludwig von Mises; and discusses the issue of what, if anything, economics can predict, an area Hayek never thoroughly explored. An air of uncertainty therefore continues to hang over many of his fundamental ideas.

There were many Hayeks: Hayek, the political scientist; Hayek, the economist; Hayek, the philosopher of social science; Hayek, the psychologist. Even in these different roles, he played many parts. As a political scientist, he was both the leading "liberal" or libertarian thinker and one of the outstanding "conservative" thinkers of the twentieth century because of his emphasis on the concept of "spontaneous order" and his relentless attacks on "constructivism," the idea that no human institution is viable unless it is deliberately designed. As an economist, he was the principal prewar advocate of the Austrian "overinvestment" theory of business cycles, in which all interest has now ceased, and a major opponent of what has been aptly called "the

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Keynesian avalanche" (for even the common term "Keynesian Revolution" amounts to an understatement of what actually happened to economic opinion after 1936).

But while the Keynesian avalanche was descending, a less publicized but equally significant discussion was taking place in respect of the economic merits of socialism. In that famous 1930s debate on "economic calculation under socialism," set in motion by an earlier article and book by Ludwig von Mises, Hayek played a leading role that influenced the nature of the debate as much as it influenced his subsequent views about both capitalism and socialism. In the meanwhile, he continued to refine the Austrian theory of capital that underpinned his theory of business cycles, but by the time he published his long-awaited *Pure Theory of Capital* (1941), the attention of economists had turned elsewhere. Hayek then abandoned pure economic theory and turned instead to writing *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), a best-seller which for some years made him a household name with the general public.

Although some of his greatest papers in economics were still to come, the next few decades saw more work in the philosophy of science and psychology than in economics proper. Hayek's interest in monetary economics, however, returned after the Nobel Prize of 1974, in particular with reference to the theory of free banking or the denationalization of money. Nevertheless, the great work of the 1970s was the four volumes of *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, which summed up a lifetime of interest in the political constitution of modern society.

But even all this was not the sum total of Hayek's efforts. If he had never written a word on the topics listed above, he would be remembered as a historian of ideas. Fritz Machlup's survey of Hayek's contributions to economics, commissioned by the Swedish Academy of Sciences on the occasion of Hayek's joint Nobel Prize in Economics in 1974, listed the following publications in the area of the history of economic thought: 24 articles and essays on individual writers; six comprehensive surveys of schools of thought and intellectual movements; one book (on *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*); and five books by major economists of the past edited or introduced. In addition, several of Hayek's topical books contain large chunks devoted to presentations of the history of some particular stream of ideas.¹

Hayek's career raises many puzzles and sometimes takes on the appearance of an endless trail of unresolved or only partly resolved issues. Was Hayek truly "Austrian" in his approach to the philosophy of economics, or did the influence of Karl Popper eventually overwhelm those of Menger and Mises? Why did Hayek abandon technical

economics during World War II and in particular why was he silent after 1935 about the rising tide of Keynesian macroeconomics? Similarly, why did he become increasingly critical of general equilibrium theory, and indeed of any version of equilibrium economics, in the course of the socialist calculation debate? Finally, why did his interest in the concept of spontaneous order and the history of the doctrine of unintended social consequences undergo very little development after the 1960s? All of his political writings are in fact amazingly repetitious, exploring a small number of big themes which, however, are not further refined or extended in new contexts. As organizing concepts, they held, I am convinced, enormous potentialities but nevertheless Hayek himself failed to realize them.

The Battle with Keynesian Economics

Let us begin with the most obvious puzzle: Hayek's withdrawal from technical economics in the 1940s and his earlier refusal to go on battling against Keynes. Let us remind ourselves that Hayek and Lionel Robbins, both at the London School of Economics, were Keynes's most conspicuous opponents in the 1930s. It is a signal fact, crucial to the unprecedented speed with which the Keynesian Revolution conquered mainstream economics, that its two principal critics quit the battlefield in the crucial years 1936–39. Hayek having published *Prices and Production* (1931) and *Monetary Theory and the Trade Cycle* (1933) and Robbins having published *The Great Depression* (1934), neither of them made any further statement on the nature of the trade cycle (apart from one or two journalistic pieces) until the 1940s.

Hayek explained his own silence in those critical years as a reluctance to repeat his earlier experience of criticizing Keynes's *Treatise on Money*. Keynes simply capitulated and sat down to write a new book, *The General Theory*; Hayek thought that Keynes would eventually change his mind about this book as he had changed his mind about the earlier one, so all he had to do was to wait. I think that this account, offered in 1966,² is disingenuous, a rationalization after the fact. What Hayek was really doing in the late 1930s was writing *The Pure Theory of Capital* (1941), which proved much longer in the making than he had imagined and which he had hoped would finally establish Austrian business cycle theory on a firm foundation.³ But the book failed to make any impact, in part because wartime circumstances turned the attention of economists away from purely technical problems in eco-

conomic theory and in part because Hayek offered no solution to the *pons asinorum* of Austrian business cycle theory, the measurability of “the average period of production”; indeed, he even went so far as to reject the very concept of the period of production or its corollary, the “period of investment.”

The Austrians’ theory of business cycles attributed slumps to over-investment in the previous boom financed by credit expansion, or what they called the “undue lengthening of the period of production.” Capital in Austrian theory is always a thing of two dimensions, magnitude and duration, and the investment of capital always means either more capital or the same amount of capital left in existing processes for a longer period of time. Now, as every clever student in the history of economic thought knows, Böhm-Bawerk, the inventor of the concept of the average period of production, never succeeded in defining the average period of production independently of the rate of interest; as Wicksell showed, it was itself a function of the interest rate and hence could not be employed to explain the determination of the latter.⁴ In short, the average period of production is not an adequate measure of the capital intensity of an economy; hence we never can say unambiguously that there is an increase of capital in a boom—and even if we could, we never can say that this implies a longer period of production in response to a fall in the rate of interest. In the absence of an adequate metric of capital, reducing it effectively to the time taken to transform inputs into output via production, the Austrian theory of business cycles is simply empty at its very center. I believe that Hayek failed to engage Keynes after the publication of *The General Theory* because he could not formulate an Austrian countertheory of the slump that was proof against purely technical objections to the standard Austrian measurement of capital.

His last effort to do so came in 1939 with the introduction, in *Profits, Interest and Investment*, of “the Ricardo Effect”—Hayek’s term for the tendency to shift to shorter and less roundabout methods of production as real wages fall and the rate of interest rises in a boom, and vice versa in a downswing. That formulation received a savage criticism from Nicholas Kaldor in 1942, who ridiculed it as “the concertina effect,” after which it disappeared into the underworld of “curious doctrines once believed long ago.” But Hayek never abandoned his theory and made one or two efforts in the 1960s to restate it without, however, rousing much interest in it. It has been persuasively argued in recent years that Hayek’s arguments fell on deaf ears because he

employed a method of analysis that was foreign to the contemporary style of economic reasoning: whereas contemporaries emphasized the comparison of static equilibrium states of income and expenditure flows, Hayek was trying to develop a dynamic theory of business cycles that involved tracing out the "traverse" adjustment path of the capital stock of an economy from one equilibrium state to another.⁵

But quite apart from speaking a different language from his peers, not just in the 1930s and 1940s but even in the 1960s, there was the further difficulty that the underlying notion of periods of production lengthening and shortening in the process of upswings and downswings in economic activity remained hopelessly ambiguous and utterly nonoperational. Most economists after 1936, including Keynes himself, were more or less convinced by Frank Knight's campaign against Austrian capital theory, which Knight based on the argument that capital could not be reduced to time, as the Austrians claimed, and that in any case the length of the period of production did not much matter.⁶ The Austrian theory of business cycles failed therefore because it contained a fatal logical flaw, a flaw that is even more apparent today after the switching controversies of the two Cambridges than it was in the 1930s.⁷

It was not only Hayek who failed to take the Keynesian Revolution seriously. Lionel Robbins likewise held back in attacking Keynes, hoping perhaps that Hayek's *Pure Theory of Capital* would soon rehabilitate the Austrian theory. A glance at the pages of the *Economic Journal* in the years 1936–39 should have revealed the extraordinary interest that *The General Theory* had aroused, particularly among younger economists, and of course Robbins was only too aware that several of the most prominent members of the department at the LSE, such as Hicks, Kaldor, Lerner, Scitovsky, and Shackle, had become converted to the new economics of Cambridge.⁸ Both Hayek and Robbins badly miscalculated the swiftness of the Keynesian Revolution and hence never did succeed in mounting any attack, much less a successful attack on the house that Keynes had built.

The Socialist Calculation Debate

The reputation of Austrian economics in the interwar period rested as much on the economic theory of socialism as on capital or business cycle theory. To most economists in, say, 1935, the name of Ludwig von Mises would have conjured up not so much the monetary overin-

vestment theory of business cycles as the proposition that economic calculation under socialism is not just irrational, but literally impossible without markets in which to price capital goods—which otherwise simply cannot be priced. The story of the socialist calculation debate has been told by Vaughn, Murrell, and at greatest length by Lavoie.⁹ Oskar Lange's brilliant *On The Economic Theory of Socialism* (1936) was judged in its day to have provided a definitive answer to Mises—the Planning Bureau could mimic “market socialism” by following appropriate price-adjustment rules—but in retrospect it is evident that Lange won the battle only in strictly formal terms. Mises and Hayek had the better case, but it was a case that they never managed to express convincingly. Be that as it may, Lange's book not only buried the Austrian critique of socialism but also promoted Walrasian general equilibrium theory as the appropriate framework for thinking about such issues as capitalism versus socialism. Hicks's *Value and Capital* (1939) was only a few years off, but already general equilibrium theory was becoming the standard of theoretical sophistication in microeconomics, in terms of which Austrian price theory stood condemned as antediluvian.

Hayek's appreciation of the learning and discovery aspects of the dynamic process of competition—as distinct from the static properties of the end-state of competitive equilibrium emphasized by mainstream neoclassical economics—displayed in his *Collectivist Economic Planning* and the seminal essay on “Economics and Knowledge” (1937), strike us nowadays as remarkably original and perceptive.¹⁰ At the time, however, they passed by without notice and even Hayek himself may not have realized how close he was to charting a wholly different territory from the “Walrasian-inspired orthodoxy” that was beginning to emerge in the late 1930s. In two celebrated papers, “The Uses of Knowledge in Society” (1945) and “The Meaning of Competition” (1946),¹¹ Hayek went on to crystalize the modern Austrian position on the pivotal role of entrepreneurship in the competitive process, “entrepreneurship” being a constant alertness to unrealized profit opportunities. Israel Kirzner, the outstanding exponent of this modern Austrian theme, has demonstrated by close textual analysis how much both Mises and Hayek learned from the great debate with Oskar Lange in the 1930s.¹² But I contend that they did not learn in equal measure. Let anyone compare Mises's 1920 essay on “Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth” with the treatment of the same issue in Mises's *Human Action* (1966), written after the publication of Hayek's papers, and the point is made: there is a sophisticated awareness of

disequilibrium adjustments of prices, quantities and, above all, knowledge in the later Mises that is missing in the earlier version. In short, it is Hayek, not Mises, who deserves to be the patron saint of Austrian economics.

Mises vs. Hayek

Mises and Hayek are usually paired together as exponents of Austrian economics but in fact they differed in a number of ways, in particular on methodological questions. Mises was an apriorist, someone who believed that all economic hypotheses can be inferred from fundamental postulates of economic behavior, which are Kantian “synthetic a priori propositions” in the sense that they are about reality but nevertheless are known to be true independently of any experience of reality. Mises denied the need to test economic theories by confronting them with empirical evidence because to do so would logically contradict Kantian apriorism. Hayek, on the other hand, always welcomed the empirical verification of the “trends” or “patterns” predicted by theoretical reasoning. He insisted that economic systems display powerful and pervasive economic regularities and certainly believed that we ought to observe these regularities so as to check that they do indeed conform to the implications of our theories.¹³ Kirzner insists that Mises and Hayek really saw eye-to-eye on the validation of economic theories,¹⁴ but a reading of Hayek’s various reviews of Mises’s books immediately dispels this complacent view of the two greatest third-generation Austrian economists. “Considering the kind of battle he [Mises] had to lead,” Hayek wrote in 1977, “I understand that he was driven to certain exaggerations, like that of the *a priori* character of economic theory, where I could not follow him.”¹⁵

One might well ask why it matters whether Mises agreed with Hayek or not. It matters, however, a great deal to both the recent and the future evolution of Austrian economics. Until very recently, pious obeisance to the heritage of Mises imparted a powerful anti-empiricist stance to all Austrian economics and suggested to young Austrians that statistical and (God forbid) econometric testing of economic theories was *pas de rigueur*. The result was an unhealthy deductive style of economic reasoning in which the great truths of Austrian economics were derived without getting out of one’s arm chair.

Nevertheless, even Hayek is prone to a form of apriorism. In his great 1934 essay on Carl Menger, Hayek wrote:

Microeconomic theory at least apart from such instances [in] which it could operate with a fairly plausible *ceteris paribus* assumption, remains thus confined to what I have called elsewhere 'pattern predictions'—predictions of the kinds of structures that could be formed from the available kind of elements. This limitation of the powers of specific prediction, which I believe is true of all theories of phenomena characterised by what Warren Weaver has called 'organised complexity' . . . is certainly valid for large parts of microeconomic theory.¹⁶

Confronted with such a "limitation theorem," one would appreciate examples to clarify its import and significance. What is it that we are unable to predict in microeconomics? The failure of a tax on butter to raise the price of butter, but by less than the amount of the tax? The lack of response of investment to a fall in interest rates? The ability of unemployment compensation to increase the level of unemployment via its effect on the supply of labor? The tendency of wages to be sticky downwards even in the face of unemployment? In the roughly 10,000 pages that Hayek wrote after 1934, I do not recall a single page in which we are told what we can or cannot predict in economics, in consequence of which I am still not convinced that the forecast of "patterns" or "trends" is the best that we can do in economics.

The publisher of *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek*¹⁷ has told us in the dust-jacket blurb that "F. A. Hayek's forceful predictions of the inevitable failure of socialism and central economic planning are now rendered irrefutable by the recent collapse of the Eastern bloc," and this is certainly an example of "pattern prediction" that comes easily to mind. But is the prediction valid? What Hayek predicted in 1935 was the imminent collapse of socialism in the USSR; even then there was the unmentioned fact that it had already survived, for better or for worse, for 18 years. From 1935, it survived for another 53 years. So, the "inevitable failure of socialism and central economic planning" took nearly three-quarters of a century to reveal itself! Perhaps this is just another example of the limitations of predictions in economics, but I would have thought that we need to rethink the Mises-Hayek thesis about economic calculations under socialism in the light of the recent events in Eastern Europe. It would appear that socialism is perfectly viable at low levels of economic development and only becomes positively unworkable when consumers begin to demand a more sophisticated mix of products. To put it another way, socialism appears to be the economics of a wartime, command economy, which begins to break down only under peacetime conditions in which there is once again the possibility of a choice between guns and butter. Socialists throughout the history of socialism always imagined that socialism was tailor-made for an economy of abundance. Instead, it seems that it makes

sense only in an economy of acute scarcity and indeed is not workable in an affluent economy.

All of this is to say that the recent economic breakdowns in Eastern Europe have not in fact confirmed the concrete predictions of Mises and Hayek; they have merely confirmed their intuition that socialism is a grossly inefficient economic system. We must admire their intuition because many of their contemporaries argued otherwise, but in retrospect it is clear that even they failed to recognize the precise weaknesses of socialism. Hayek went on of course to write about socialism almost to the day he died, and the political case against socialism came in time to weigh more heavily with him than the economic arguments he had earlier employed. But the fact remains that he never foresaw just how and just why the socialist economies of Poland, Hungary, the USSR, and Eastern Germany would collapse in the way they did.

NOTES

1. Fritz Machlup, ed., *Essays on Hayek* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 43.
2. Friedrich A. Hayek, "Personal Recollections of Keynes and the 'Keynesian Revolution,'" *Oriental Economist* (January 1966), reprinted in Friedrich A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
3. As he testified in 1963: "[After] *Prices and Production* . . . I soon became aware that the theory of capital on which I had built was much too oversimplified to carry the burden of the superstructure I had tried to build on it. The result was that I had to devote most of the next decade to providing a more satisfactory theory of capital than that I had to work with. I am afraid it still seems to me the part of economic theory which is in the least satisfactory state." *The Collected Works of Friedrich Hayek*, Vol. IV (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 37.
4. For an explanation of this point, see Mark Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 512–15.
5. Laurence S. Moss and Karen I. Vaughn, "Hayek's Ricardo Effect: A Second Look," *History of Political Economy* 18, no. 4 (1986), reprinted in *The History of Economic Thought*, ed. Mark Blaug (Aldershot, England: Edward Elgar, 1990), 328–48. I tried to criticize the Ricardo Effect in the first edition of my *Economic Theory in Retrospect* (1962) as a formally correct but totally unrealistic theorem in comparative statics—in short, I misunderstood it. I spent an hour in a Paris hotel lobby with Friedrich Hayek in 1967 explaining my criticism; he gently reproved me, but not in the terms employed by Moss and Vaughn. This is not an argument against their interpretation

but merely an explanation of my lifelong fascination with the Ricardo Effect.

6. See Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 519–21; S. Ahmad, *Capital in Economic Theory* (Aldershot, England: Edward Elgar, 1991), 438–41; Barry J. McCormick, *Hayek and the Keynesian Avalanche* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), ch. 5, 99–134.
7. See Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 523–28. Even sympathetic commentators on Hayek's business cycle theory concede something like this, e.g., Roger W. Garrison, "Hayekian Trade Cycle Theory: A Reappraisal," *Cato Journal* 6, no. 2 (1980): 437–53; Gottfried Haberler, "Reflections on Hayek's Business Cycle Theory," *Cato Journal* 6, no. 2 (1986): 421–35. However, other Austrian commentators simply glide over the difficulty as if this would make it go away: Mark Skousen, *The Structure of Production* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), chs. 3, 4.
8. Denis P. O'Brien, *Lionel Robbins* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 106–17.
9. Karen I. Vaughn, "Economic Calculation Under Socialism: The Austrian Contribution," *Economic Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1980): 535–54; Peter Murrell, "Did the Theory of Market Socialism Answer the Challenge of Ludwig von Mises? A Reinterpretation of the Socialist Controversy," *History of Political Economy* 15 no. 1 (1982): 52–105; both reprinted in Harold Hotelling, *Lionel Robbins, Ludwig von Mises*, ed. Mark Blaug (Aldershot, England: Edward Elgar, 1992); Don Lavoie, *Rivalry and Central Planning: The Socialist Calculation Debate Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
10. Friedrich A. Hayek, ed., *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935), 201ff; "Economics and Knowledge," *Economica* 4 (new ser., 1937): 33–54, reprinted in Friedrich A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), ch. 2.
11. Reprinted in *ibid.*
12. Israel Kirzner, *The Meaning of Market Process: Essays in the Development of Modern Austrian Economics* (London: Routledge, 1992), ch. 6, 100–18.
13. On Hayek's by-no-means-unambiguous empiricism, see Terence W. Hutchison, *The Politics and Philosophy of Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), ch. 7, 203–32; Bruce Caldwell, "Hayek the Falsificationist? A Refutation," *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*, vol. 10, ed. W. J. Samuels (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1992).
14. Kirzner, ch. 7, 119–36.
15. *The Collected Works of Friedrich A. Hayek*, Vol. IV, 158; see also 142, 147–48, and the comments of the editor, Peter G. Klein, 9–13, who leaves no doubt that in his opinion there was a wide methodological gulf between Hayek and Mises.
16. *Ibid.*, 103.
17. *Collected Works of Friedrich A. Hayek*, Vol. IV.

THE DISTRIBUTIONAL IMPACT
OF THE EIGHTIES:
MYTH VS. REALITY

Is there truth to the widespread belief that the 1980s saw a redistribution of income upward, from the poor and the middle class to the rich? While the eighties witnessed an abundance of new and high-paying jobs and a sharp redistribution of taxes upward, income inequality did increase. But this was not because the poor lost ground but because the rich gained more ground than the poor. In reality, then, the eighties were not only good for the rich and the middle class but met Rawlsian standards of "justice as fairness."

Primitive and simplistic as it may seem upon reflection, the temptation to anthropomorphize historical epochs will probably survive as long as modernity does. It is a way of giving order to a complex world, a source of control over change, and a triumph of ethics over abundant and bewildering evidence.

By the end of the 1980s, the personification of that decade was proceeding apace. In fact, one might say that it began with the election of Ronald Reagan—when the decade was hardly under way. Here was a change so unexpected, a fact so discordant, that it cried out for canalization by means of labeling. The rush to categorization was so far advanced by the end of the decade that, as cultural historians will

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doubtless conclude, by 1989 (with the accession of George Bush), the intonation of a "kinder, gentler nation" could already elicit nostalgia mixed with outrage over the Decade of Selfishness that was rigidly fixed in the amber of our consciousness even before it had stopped moving.

Thus is political and economic discourse shaped in the Western democracies. Before alternative views can be weighed and differences of opinion aired, the conventional wisdom is set firmly in place, often by means of historical mythology that perpetuates, in easily graspable form, the commonplaces of the opinion-making classes. Once it has been repeated often enough that we have lived through an era of growing inequality and impoverishment, it is difficult to question the factual basis that is presumed to underlie the myth as it is, for instance, to challenge the notion that the Great Depression represented a crisis of laissez-faire capitalism, that the Gilded Age showed the need for regulating the Robber Barons, or that the Industrial Revolution impoverished the factory workers.

One reason for the difficulty is that a good myth reifies as objective a partisan view of the world. Forgetting that partisanship ran both ways, we write off as interested propagandists only those contemporaries of the English cotton industry who did *not* agree that all was dark and satanic in the mills. And to attempt to examine these naysayers' arguments without prejudice is assumed to commit the contemporary scholar to all of his subjects' iconoclastic political commitments. Similarly with the economic historian of the 1980s. Since the idea that the decade "celebrated greed" was a transatlantic expression of liberal political sentiment—but a successful one—accepting the idea now puts one in the disinterested intellectual mainstream, while challenging it makes one a defender of Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher. It is after all Reagan and Thatcher, or rather what they were taken to represent by their opponents, who animate perceptions of the eighties.

We propose to contribute to economically assessing the factual basis of the conventional wisdom about the eighties in America, without committing ourselves to any broad-brush verdict on Reagan or even Reaganomics. Therefore, we bypass the important question of whether, in reality, Reagan actually did celebrate greed, and the less vital matter of apportioning credit or blame for what happened during the period. On the other hand, we must unavoidably deal with various perceptions of the way the economy works, involving us to some extent in disputes over which passions have not yet cooled.

Distributional Worldviews

One way of looking at the economy — surely a minority perspective, held by few even in the relatively *laissez-faire* economics profession — is the “supply-side” view, which seeks to increase economic returns to the productive segments of the economy largely by means of reducing the burden of taxation borne by them. A word of definition is in order. The term “supply-side economics,” as used here, does not connote the somewhat simplistic combination of “straw man” and “*deus ex machina*” that has been widely circulated. Again, the problem of myth as apparent reality must be confronted. Supply-side economists argue that economic growth can be stimulated by reducing the rate of taxation on entrepreneurial activity. By no means does this entail the multiple positions that have been attributed to supply siders, without documentation, by Martin Feldstein, Walter Salant, Alan Blinder, and many others.¹

That supply-side economic notions might to some suggest motives of crass materialism and a glorification of inequality is obvious. The high-income sector of the nation’s population well might have a larger share of the economic pie under supply-side policies. However, to invoke something of a cliché, the pie itself could be larger, so that rich and poor alike end up with higher levels of income than they otherwise would have. This was one of the largely unheard replies that was made in the eighties against the rapidly coalescing consensus that the decade signified the triumph of greed.

On a level of greater theoretical sophistication than simple moralistic opposition to inequality per se is the straightforward notion that the size of the economic pie is unaffected by its distribution; transferring income from one portion of the population to another, such as from high-to low-income people, does not affect the total amount of available income.² The denial of any linkage between the distribution of income and macroeconomic outcomes allows adherents of redistribution to treat income distribution simply as a matter of equity. If public policy can pursue with impunity whatever distribution of income is thought to be fair, since there are no macroeconomic consequences associated with using government to take income from the rich and give it to the poor, then concern for expanding the supply side seems merely selfish.

A more intriguing anti-supply-side argument is one that emerges rather naturally out of the intellectual heritage of Keynes’s contribution to economic understanding. It maintains that there is a relation-

ship between the distribution of income and macroeconomic performance, but that it is the opposite of the one suggested by supply-siders. Thus, redistributing income from the rich to the poor will *increase* economic activity by increasing purchasing power. The Keynesian origins of such a view have been described quite nicely by David Felix in a recent paper in this journal.³ The short title of his piece, "Consuming Our Way to Greater Well-Being," suggests Keynes's line of reasoning, which contains "the powerful implication that the equalization or redistribution of incomes would improve general economic well-being."⁴ This argument was made frequently by the political opposition, with the support of the intellectual mainstream, during the early eighties. For example, at the height of the 1982 economic downturn, Representative Henry Reuss, Chairman of the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, representing the Democrats, responded to Ronald Reagan's radio address of October 9, 1982, as follows:

President Reagan's prosperity plan was called "trickle-down" economics. . . .

Well, it didn't work. . . .

There was a shift in income *away* from *ordinary* people and toward the wealthy. The result was a boom market in luxuries. . . . Ordinary people started to run out of purchasing power. There just wasn't enough ordinary income for ordinary people to take ordinary goods off the shelves. That . . . brought us our hard times.⁵

Worldviews Interpreting the World

As the eighties proceeded, the debate over economic policy turned more and more toward assessing changes in the distribution of income and blaming greater inequality on Reagan administration initiatives. One target of such analysis was the Economic Recovery and Tax Act of 1981, which cut federal personal income tax rates by approximately 25 percent in three stages, beginning in late 1981. In addition, the maximum marginal rate of income taxation was immediately reduced from 70 to 50 percent. Although it was the Democrats in Congress who were most resolute in effecting the reduction in the maximum marginal rate of taxation of income,⁶ the propriety of these tax cuts and their association with "Reaganomics" was raised within the year, prompted in part by the economic downturn that began in 1982. As economic conditions worsened in the latter half of 1982, the anti-tax

cut rhetoric escalated. For example, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., journeyed to the Congress to testify that

some in high places today would have us abandon social responsibility in the name of unbridled individualism. They claim that the best way to meet our problems is to cut social programs for the poor and taxes for the rich. They would remove the protecting arm of the government from our industrial life, consign working people to the harsh mercies of the unregulated market, and redistribute income from the poor and middle class to the already affluent. . . . Their policies are rekindling the fires of class war.⁷

Simple equations of supply-side economics with class interests were commonplace throughout the decade. Just a month before Schlesinger's assessment, former Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall criticized Reaganomics as being "very inefficient, relying on the theory that tax breaks for the wealthy and big corporations will 'trickle down' to ordinary working people and the poor," and "extremely regressive in its impact on our society, redistributing wealth and power from the middle class and the poor to the rich and shifting more of the tax burden away from business and high-income groups and onto low-and-middle-income consumers."⁸ Later, after the passage of the 1986 tax legislation, the *Washington Post* asserted editorially that "the president's position on taxes is at bottom not a macroeconomic but a distributional position."⁹ This was to be the enduring theme of liberals during the 1980s.

The 1986 tax legislation reduced the marginal tax rate at the highest income levels to 28 percent, triggering a new round of class-conflict analyses. By this time, the budget deficit had become more important in the debate over tax policy. The year 1987 was marked by an increase in the political pressure to raise taxes in order to close the deficit. Reducing or eliminating the deficit was important both because it deterred the expansion of social spending and because it was thought to limit economic growth. The first of these views was combined with supply-side-Reaganomics-as-selfishness by House Speaker Jim Wright, who declared: "The president isn't opposed to taxes, he's just opposed to taxes on rich people. I'd rather postpone a tax cut for the people making more than \$150,000 than cut back on the fight against drugs, or Medicare or Medicaid benefits or help for kids going to college."¹⁰

The second argument against the economic consequences of the deficit emerged full force with the stock market crash in the latter half of 1987. When the Dow-Jones Industrial Average fell almost a thou-

sand points between August 25 and the close of business on October 19, the necessity of a tax increase seemed obvious to the public affairs commentators, who play an important role in shaping informed public opinion. In the wake of the 508-point “free-fall” of October 19, James Reston of the *New York Times* wrote:

At the time of the crash, the Secretaries of State and the Treasury were out of the country, and the President, as usual, was out to lunch.

It is not the mathematics of the crash that are worrying the leaders of both parties and the allies abroad but a feeling that Washington is leaderless and following a policy of spend and spend, borrow and borrow, that is threatening not only the security of the nation but of the civilization it is supposed to lead.¹¹

Hobart Rowen of the *Washington Post* wrote in the same vein:

Now the joyride is over, but so far, the staggering record stock market collapse has been met with government denial reminiscent of 1929. . . .

“The economy is fundamentally sound,” said Treasury Secretary James Baker III. And President Reagan, who gives every evidence of being totally out of touch with reality, told reporters, “I don’t know what meaning it [the October 19 decline in the Dow-Jones index] might have, all the business indicators are up—there’s nothing wrong with the economy.”¹²

Echoing the sentiments of their columnists, both the *Times* and the *Post* came out in favor of raising taxes. The *Times* editorialized that “it is widely recognized—outside the White House—that there can’t be adequate deficit reduction without increasing taxes.”¹³ The *Post* provided a most succinct visual critique of the Reagan years in the form of a Herblock editorial cartoon depicting the opening of a safe that had been retrieved from an underwater shipwreck. The safe is labeled “Reaganomics,” and the sunken ship bears the name “The Great Boom.” As the safe is opened, its contents are revealed to be a very, very small mouse.¹⁴ It is fair to say that this is still the conventional wisdom regarding the source of the Bush recession. To simplify the simplifications, one may summarize the consensus as holding that tax cuts were undertaken as part of the Reagan administration’s apotheosis of the greed of the wealthy, resulting in social service cutbacks and an enormous deficit that hurt not only the poor but, ultimately, the economy as a whole.

When Were the Eighties?

One thing that makes the conventional wisdom so attractive is that it draws on substantial agreement from Ronald Reagan himself. His 1980 campaign portrayed him as a political revolutionary, and his critics took him at his word. Thus, the initial tax cuts were widely interpreted as heralding a new era; John Kenneth Galbraith, for one, depicted the early 1980s as “a period of unprecedented experiment in economic policy.”¹⁵ Congressman Henry Reuss described the circumstances surrounding the enactment of the 1981 tax legislation as being most unusual:

Collectively, we scurried to the bidding of the economic royalists, the supply-side ideologues, the special interest lobbyists and the self-appointed arbiters of morality who spoke in [the Administration's] name. Fear muddled our judgment and poisoned our debate. It drove the weak and susceptible among us to espouse strange and indefensible ideas. And it drove a majority among us to accept the most reprehensible tax and spending changes of my public career.¹⁶

Given the widespread perception associating the eighties with Reagan and Reagan with radicalism,¹⁷ an evaluation of the decade should probably begin with the year Reagan took office, 1981, and end when he left, 1989. This is already a departure from mythology, which sometimes has led analysts of supply-side ideas cum Reagan cum the 1980s to judge the first of these on the basis of a literal or even exaggerated definition of the last. Thus, one “factual” component of the Myth of the Eighties is that the highly touted jobs created during the decade paid little: America was becoming a nation in which we were all “flipping hamburgers for each other” for a living. This notion originated in a study by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison that included 1979 and 1980 statistics, implying that the problems of these years could be traced to supply-side policies that had not yet been implemented.¹⁸ Had they begun with 1981, they would have found that the newly created jobs were predominantly of the high-paying variety. Or, as Marvin Kusters and Murray Ross showed in a very thorough evaluation, a more appropriate methodology would have shown no change in the relative importance of low-paying jobs, even with the years 1979 and 1980 included.¹⁹

We choose to contrast the period of 1981–1989 with that of 1973–1981, whose beginning, like 1981, precedes by a year or so a major economic downturn,²⁰ but in which economic policies sharply contrasted with

those of 1981–1989. Most importantly, effective federal personal income tax rates rose consistently between 1973 and 1981, especially for those with higher levels of income, due largely to the phenomenon of “bracket creep” that accompanied the very substantial price inflation of the time.²¹ Further, there was a substantial increase in social spending, however defined. The volume of transfer payments to persons expressed as a percentage of GNP rose by one-third, and various non-cash transfers also increased significantly.²² Thus, there was an increasing tendency to attempt to tax income away from those in the middle and the top of the income distribution and transfer it to those at the bottom.

One might compare the eighties with the sixties rather than the seventies. But the two periods are too similar to make for useful contrasts, since both were periods of declining tax rates. Contrary to Galbraith’s pronouncement that the 1980s were a period of unprecedented experiment in economic policy, much the same approach had been taken to the relationship between taxation and economic growth during the Kennedy and Johnson years. The Kennedy-Johnson tax cuts, enacted into law in 1964, reduced the maximum marginal income tax rate from 91 to 70 percent. Walter Heller, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, testified in 1964 that “the new tax cut will sharply step up our rate of economic growth”²³ because of a “trickle-down” effect, a rising economic tide that would lift many but not all boats.

What Were the Eighties Like?

Pure measures of aggregate economic activity demonstrate that the U.S. economy performed at a measurably higher level during the 1980s than the 1970s,” as a glance at Table 1 shows.²⁴ Of particular interest is that African Americans fared better than whites from the standpoint of per capita income. As for job creation, we should point out that there were fewer new potential job holders during the eighties, making the greater gain in the number of jobs even more impressive: 1.04 jobs were created for each additional potential job holder versus 0.67 jobs in the seventies.

The question of the “quality” of jobs created in the 1980s raised by Bluestone and Harrison has been commented upon above, but additional detail is useful. They compared 1979 with 1984 and concluded that 58 percent of the new jobs created were of the low-paying variety,

Table 1: Statistical Measures of Economic Conditions in the United States, 1973-1989

Measure	1973	1981	1989	Change 1973-1981	Change 1981-1989
Real Gross National Pro- duct (1982 \$)	2744.1	3248.8	4142.6	+ 18.39%	+ 27.51%
Civilian Non- Institutional Population, Age 16 and older (thousands)	147,096	170,130	186,393	+ 23,034	+ 16,263
Civilian Em- ployment (thousands)	85,064	100,397	117,342	+ 15,333	+ 16,945
Ratio: Change in Employment/ Change in Population	—	—	—	0.666	1.042
Real Per Capita Income (1989 \$)					
All	10,879	11,655	14,056	+ 7.13%	+ 20.60%
White	11,457	12,357	14,896	+ 7.86%	+ 20.55%
Black	6,623	7,059	8,747	+ 6.58%	+ 23.91%
Ratio: Black/ White	0.578	0.571	0.587	- 0.007	+ 0.016
Real Mean Household Income (1982-1984 \$)					
Low Quintile	6,678	6,333	6,994	- 5.17%	+ 10.44%
Middle Quintile	27,327	26,136	28,925	- 4.36%	+ 10.67%
Top Quintile	69,674	69,594	85,529	- 0.11%	+ 22.90%

Table 1 (continued)

Measure	1973	1981	1989	Change 1973-1981	Change 1981-1989
Ratio: Top/Low Quintiles	10.43	10.99	12.23	+ 0.56	+ 1.24
Gini Coeffi- cient of Income Inequality	0.397	0.406	0.431	+ 0.009	+ 0.025
Federal Transfers as Percent of GNP	6.89%	9.24%	8.77%	+ 2.35	- 0.47

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States 1989* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1990), Appendix E; and *Economic Report of the President 1991* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), Appendix B.

while high-paying jobs actually decreased. However, with 1981 as the point of departure, only 16.9 percent of the new jobs created by 1984 were low paying, and only 6.1 percent by 1985. Similarly, between 1981 and 1984, 38.9 percent of new jobs were high paying, as were 46.9 percent of the new jobs between 1981 and 1985.

Yet, in the long run, there has been little change in the distribution of jobs among relative pay categories. In 1973, 31.8 percent of all jobs were low paying. By 1985, the figure was 31.4 percent. Medium-pay jobs rose from 51.6 to 52.6 percent of all jobs, and high-paying jobs declined from 16.6 to 15.9 percent of the total.²⁵ The quality of jobs seems to be a nonissue.²⁶

The macroeconomic performance data argue quite strongly that the 1980s saw a revitalization of the U.S. economy (as did the 1960s). But whose boats did the rising tide of the 1980s lift? One part of this issue is whether the tax burden was redistributed downward. Table 2 indicates that between 1949 and 1981, the share of federal personal income taxes borne by the top 5 percent declined consistently, while the share paid by the middle 45 percent rose substantially. These trends were reversed in the eighties, while the tax burden of the bottom half continued its long-term decline. Thus, in the seven years following 1981, the tax share of those at the top was increased sharply, with consequent

Table 2: Percentage Share of Federal Personal Income Tax Paid, by Percentile Group, United States, 1949–1988

Percentile Group	1949	1981	1988
Top 5%	44.8%	34.9%	45.5%
Middle 45%	41.3	57.6	48.7
Bottom 50%	14.0	7.5	5.7

Source: Internal Revenue Service estimates provided to the authors by the Joint Economic Committee of Congress.

declines in the shares of the remaining 95 percent of those filing tax returns. Clearly, the prosperity of the 1980s was not achieved at the cost of increasing the burden of federal personal income taxation borne by the poor and middle classes. It is also worth noting that these trends appear to have been reinforced by the tax legislation of 1986, which clearly is in the same spirit as its 1981 counterpart. If anything, the 1986 changes reduce the progressivity of the income tax structure even more dramatically than the 1981 tax innovations.²⁷ The result? Between 1986 and 1988, the tax share of the top 5 percent rose from 41.8 to 45.5 percent, that of the middle 45 percent fell from 51.6 to 48.7 percent, and the burden of the bottom 50 percent declined from 6.6 to 5.7 percent.²⁸

There still remains the issue of the overall income distribution. Did it become more unequal in the eighties? As measured by the general purpose index of income inequality, the Gini coefficient,²⁹ unquestionably it did. That index rose by about 6 percent between 1981 and 1989. This represents an acceleration of a longer-term trend that began in 1969.³⁰ The shift in inequality is confirmed by the fact that in both the 1970s and the 1980s, the bottom quintile fared worse than the top. But in the eighties, this was a matter of gaining *less*, as opposed to *losing more*, than the top quintile.

More recently, the appropriateness of using the Gini coefficient measure to evaluate changes in economic inequality over time has been questioned. The critics make the point that this approach is static in character, measuring the relative economic positions of people at a single point in time. What this fails to capture is the possibility that people move between income classes to a substantial extent. U.S. Treasury Department data abstracted from income tax records indicate that at the conclusion of the 10-year period 1979–1988, almost two-

thirds of income tax filers were in a quintile of the income distribution different from that occupied at the beginning.³¹ Even more intriguing are data contained in an Urban Institute evaluation of the impact of intertemporal income mobility on the relative economic position of people. They show that in the 10-year interval 1977-1986, the greatest absolute and relative income growth was experienced by those families that began the decade in the lowest quintile of the income distribution.³² This information, shown in Table 3, prompted the authors of the Urban Institute study to conclude, "This pattern . . . may be surprising to the general public, which has been led to believe that the poor were literally getting poorer over the last decade or two, and that incomes of the rich were skyrocketing. This is simply not true."³³

Some very simple calculations using the Urban Institute numbers show that those who began the decade in question in the middle- or lower-income quintiles received over 75 percent of the total increase in income in that 10-year period. Those who began in the top quintile received only 10.8 percent of the total increase in income. Among those who started at the bottom, movement to higher income classes increased their income by 50 percent. By contrast, in the previous 10-year period (1967-1976) upward income mobility raised the income of those beginning at the bottom by only 36 percent.

While the time periods do not match precisely our definition of the seventies and eighties, the clear implication of the Urban Institute study is that the standard characterization of the eighties as an era in which the "rich" took advantage of the "poor" is very questionable. If anything, the eighties were marked by increasing upward income mobility for those at the bottom of the income distribution.

Table 3: Average Family Income, by Quintile in 1977, United States, 1977 and 1986 (in constant 1991 dollars)

Quintile	1977 Quintile Members in 1977	1977 Quintile Members in 1986	Percent Change	Percent of Total Income Gain
Bottom	\$15,853	\$27,998	77%	28%
Second	31,340	43,041	37	27
Third	43,297	51,796	20	20
Fourth	57,486	63,314	10	14
Top	92,531	97,140	5	11

Source: Urban Institute.

What Did the Eighties Mean?

On the basis of the available evidence, the 1980s provide us with a number of useful lessons. First, they appear to confirm that the economy can be stimulated if those who are at the top, or striving to get to the top, of the income distribution have greater incentives to engage in economic activities that generate additional output and income. Put in a simpler and more direct way, reducing the maximum marginal tax rates seems to encourage people to work more. Second, the resulting economic growth seems to benefit everyone. In the eighties, jobs were created at a pace so substantial that the growth in employment exceeded the growth in the number of potential job holders—an unprecedented achievement in the post-World War II period. Even more unprecedented was the decline in the official unemployment rate for seven consecutive years, something that had never happened before.

Clearly, the eighties was a decade of substantial across-the-board economic opportunity, both in terms of job creation and the potential to improve one's income position. The gains were widely dispersed and not narrowly concentrated. Yet, the myth persists that the period was just the opposite, an era marked by increasingly limited economic opportunity.

Perhaps this controversy is fitting in its own way. After all, this was a decade that opened on a quarrelsome note. The political and economic rhetoric was quite diverse, some of it exceedingly somber, even pessimistic, and some quite positive and upbeat. On the dark side, many leading experts of the time suggested grim prospects ahead. For example, in March 1980, that venerable body, the American Assembly, with the sponsorship of the Annenberg School of Communications Center for the Study of the American Experience, convened a meeting to discuss the topic, "Economic Issues and the President: 1980 and Beyond." The preface to the proceedings of this assembly contained the following remark:

As we enter the decade of the eighties, more and more Americans are beginning to question whether our economy is manageable. Some observers have suggested that our economy is "over the hill" and that we must either undertake fundamental changes to our whole system or else face the prospect of becoming a second-rate nation, watching others take over the primacy of world economic leadership.³⁴

Concurring in such an assessment, Otto Eckstein, forecasting guru par excellence, predicted a continuance of the stagflation of the seven-

ties, only worse. He argued that with “aggressive demand management, aiming at unemployment rates averaging six percent or less . . . inflation will simply become worse and worse—until the public despairs and forces politicians to adopt price controls.”³⁵ And from Paul Samuelson, writing in *Newsweek*, came the observation that “a basic fact about present-day Americans is our scaled-down expectations. This seems a rational rather than a pathological reaction to what have been the actualities of the 1970s.”³⁶ Samuelson’s pessimism was reflected in his economic forecasts for the 1980s. What he saw were average levels of unemployment in excess of 8 percent, average rates of price inflation of more than 9 percent with frequent excursions into the double-digit range, and perhaps an average real growth rate in gross national product of 2 percent a year.³⁷

As an alternative to the “doom and gloom” scenarios sketched by the professional economists, relatively untutored amateurs suggested that the solution to the nation’s problems was relatively simple—merely cut taxes. As good a statement as any of their position is given by the following excerpt from a letter to the editor that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* in July 1978. It was penned by Senator William Roth and read:

By imposing barriers between effort and reward, our present tax system is threatening to destroy the American dream of upward mobility. The excessive tax rates have stagnated our economy and too many Americans are facing the prospect of downward mobility. Substantial tax rate reductions are needed to encourage people to work harder, to be more innovative, to take risks, and be able to lead a better life. These tax cuts are needed to breathe life into our free enterprise system and to increase the prospects for upward mobility and a higher standard of living for all Americans.³⁸

Roth was responding to a column written by Walter Heller, analyzing in scathing terms his and Congressman Jack Kemp’s proposal to substantially reduce income tax rates. At one point, Heller scoffed that “P. T. Barnum [should] move over” and concluded with the assessment that the Kemp-Roth proposal “would simply overwhelm our existing productive capacity with a tidal wave of increased demand and sweep away all hopes of . . . containing inflation.”³⁹

In the event, tax rates were reduced, and, as the data we have reported indicate, the American economy flourished, contrary to the prognostications of many leading economists.⁴⁰ But the price was felt by many to be excessive, a view that gave rise to the myth that the eighties were “unfair.” To be sure, the static measures of the distribu-

tion of money income became more unequal. However, the evidence suggests that there is something of a tradeoff between the level of income of the poor and their income relative to the affluent.

As is so often the case, the economic world offers us choices. This time the choice seems to be between a higher absolute standard of living and greater opportunities for improvement for those at the bottom of the income distribution on the one hand, and on the other hand a better relative economic position with reduced income mobility for what John Rawls would call the least advantaged. Static income distribution during the 1980s could have been more equal, but apparently at the expense of (1) reducing the real income level of the poor below what it turned out to be and (2) reducing upward income mobility. To Rawls, arguably, maximizing the absolute income position of the poor and providing greater upward movement through the income distribution is the equitable course of action. To strict egalitarians, income position per se is the important thing. From the latter standpoint, the standard characterizations of the decade of the eighties seem to be quite accurate. But for those concerned with economic well-being rather than economic equality, the now-hegemonic myths about the 1980s seem quite inappropriate.⁴¹

NOTES

1. For a description of these characterizations of "supply-side" notions, see Martin Anderson, *Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 140-63. Anderson provides evidence on the lack of documentation of the views set forth by Feldstein, "Supply-Side Economics: Old Truths and New Claims," *American Economic Review* 76, no. 2 (May 1986): 342-46; Walter S. Salant, *A Critical Look at Supply-Side Theory and a Brief Look at Some of Its International Aspects* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987); and Alan S. Blinder, *Hard Heads, Soft Hearts: Tough-Minded Economics for a Just Society* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1987).
2. This view is epitomized by Lester Thurow, *The Zero-Sum Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).
3. David Felix, "Consuming Our Way to Greater Well-Being: Theory and History," *CRITICAL REVIEW*, 3, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1989): 589-99.
4. *Ibid.*, 590.
5. Remarks of Representative Henry Reuss, Democratic Response to President's Radio Address, Saturday October 9, 1982; mimeograph, circulated within the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, October 1982.
6. On this point, see Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 286.

7. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Statement," before Joint Economic Committee of Congress, *Hearings, Political Economy and Constitutional Reform*, 97th Cong., 2d Sess., Pt. 1, November 17 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 227.
8. Ray Marshall, "Statement," before Joint Economic Committee of Congress, *Hearings, The Unemployment Crisis and Policies for Economic Recovery*, 97th Cong., 2d Sess., October 15 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 32.
9. *Washington Post*, March 22, 1987, sec. A, p. 6, col. a.
10. *Washington Post*, March 6, 1987, sec. A, p. 7, col. a.
11. *New York Times*, October 21, 1987, sec. I, p. 35, col. 1.
12. *Washington Post*, October 21, 1987, sec. A, p. 23, col. d.
13. *New York Times*, October 21, 1987, sec. I, p. 34.
14. *Washington Post*, October 29, 1987, sec. A, p. 24.
15. John Kenneth Galbraith, "Statement," before Joint Economic Committee of Congress, *Hearings, The Unemployment Crisis*, op. cit., 21.
16. Henry Reuss, Speech on the floor of the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, No. 133, Pt. II, September 30 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 8241-42.
17. There clearly was a supposition that Ronald Reagan was different from anything that had gone before. Witness George Bush's characterization of his economic policy proposals as "voodoo economics" during the 1980 primary campaign. However, this may be something of a misinterpretation of reality. Public policy with respect to taxes did change, but there are comparable historic periods in which the same is true. Certainly, the level of federal government spending was not reduced. The best that can be said is that perhaps growth in spending on certain programs was slowed.
18. Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Great American Job Machine: The Proliferation of Low Wage Employment in the U.S. Economy*, a study prepared for the Joint Economic Committee of Congress (Washington, D.C.: Joint Economic Committee of Congress, December 1986).
19. Marvin H. Kusters and Murray N. Ross, "A Shrinking Middle Class?" *The Public Interest* 90 (Winter 1988): 3-27.
20. These periods represent, roughly, peak-to-peak movements in the business cycle. The National Bureau of Economic Research dating of business cycles shows a peak in November 1973 and one in July 1981. There is an intermediate cycle which had a peak in January 1980. The cycle peak following 1981 did not occur until 1990. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 539, Table 895.
21. For statistical evidence with respect to the magnitude of increases in federal personal income tax rates, see Table 511, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1989* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 317. The evidence reported there indicates that the effective tax rate for a

married couple with two dependents and an income of \$25,000 (in 1980 dollars) rose from 12.9 to 14.0 percent between 1970 and 1980. With income of \$35,000 (again in 1980 dollars), the effective tax rate rises from 15.3 to 18.8 percent. At a real income of \$75,000, the effective tax rate increased from 23.3 to 31.2 percent.

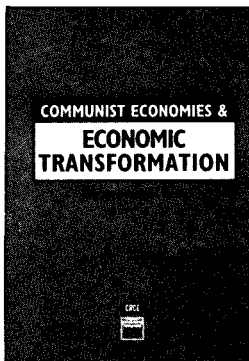
22. In particular, medical care expenditures rose substantially. In 1983, they amounted to 1.79 percent of GNP. By 1981, this percentage had risen to 2.69. *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), various issues.
23. Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Hearings before the Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, 88th Cong., 2d Sess., pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), 27.
24. A number of comparisons between the periods 1981–1989 and 1973–1981 are made in this section. Many of the statistics that will be described require adjustment to remove the impact on them of changes in the general level of prices, that is, they need to be expressed in real terms. The choice of a measure of price levels to be used in making these conversions is important. Quite often, analysts have employed the straightforward “official” Consumer Price Index (CPI) for this purpose, a case in point being Bluestone and Harrison in their quality of jobs study. Unfortunately, the methodology of constructing the CPI was somewhat flawed prior to 1983. The problem lay in the way in which homeowner costs were treated, and it led to an overstating of the rate of price inflation during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The method of constructing the index began to improve in 1983, but the “official” data series has not been revised, primarily for legal reasons. However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has developed an alternative index for use in making historical comparisons, designated as CPI-U-X1, which it recommends using in such situations. We have used it here where needed. Adopting the CPI-U-X1 price series tends to improve the economic performance statistics for the interval 1973–1981 while having a negligible impact on those for 1981–1989.
25. The Bluestone–Harrison database was reworked by Christopher Frenze, a senior staff economist for the Joint Economic Committee of Congress, to provide estimates for 1981. The results were reported in Warren Brookes, “Low Pay Jobs: The Big Lie,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 1987, p. 30, col. 3.
26. This view is consistent with that expressed by Patrick J. Macmahon and John H. Tschetter, “The Declining Middle Class: A Further Analysis,” *Monthly Labor Review*, 109, no. 9 (September 1986): 22–27.
27. The 1986 tax bill reduced the maximum marginal tax rate from 50 to 28 percent, a decline of 44 percent. By contrast, the 1981 measure reduced it from 70 to 50 percent, a fall of 28.6 percent.
28. A detailed analysis of the distributional impact of the 1986 restructuring of

- income tax rates reveals that it benefited all income classes. See Roy Boyd, Lowell Gallaway, and Richard Vedder, "Across Group Pareto Efficiency and the 1986 Tax Reform: A General Equilibrium Assessment," *Economic Notes* 21, no. 1, (1992): 60-72.
29. The data reported here are for households in the United States. The Gini coefficient is a measure of income inequality that ranges from zero to one, with zero indicating absolute equality in the income distribution (every household has the same income as every other household) and one indicating absolute inequality (one household has all the income).
 30. The pattern of behavior of the Gini coefficient in the post-World War II era is one of general decline from 1947 through 1968 and increases in the Gini after 1968 through 1989.
 31. These data are reported in Christopher Frenze, *Income Mobility and Income Opportunity*, Minority Staff Study, Joint Economic Committee of Congress, Washington, D.C., 1992.
 32. Isabel Sawhill and Mark Condon, "Is U.S. Inequality Really Growing?" *Policy Bites* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 1992).
 33. *Ibid.*, 3.
 34. The published proceedings bear a slightly different title than the conference itself, namely, *The Economy and the President: 1980 and Beyond* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980). The preface was written by William H. Sullivan, president of the American Assembly.
 35. Otto Eckstein, "Choices for the Eighties," in *The Economy and the President*, op. cit., 90-91.
 36. Paul A. Samuelson, "Outlook for the 80s," *Newsweek*, December 15, 1980, p. 88.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. William Roth, letter to the editor, *Wall Street Journal*, July 17, 1978, p. 11.
 39. Walter Heller, "The Kemp-Roth Laffer Free Lunch," *Wall Street Journal*, July 12, 1978, p. 20.
 40. Rejection of the basic premise of the Kemp-Roth argument came from a wide range of sources. For example, Gardner Ackley, Heller's successor in the Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, agreed with Heller, as did Herbert Stein, Chairman of the Council during a part of the Nixon-Ford years. Ackley is quoted in the August 1978 *Dun's Monthly* as saying, "If Keynesians are correct that tax cuts increase demand by more than they raise supply, a mammoth \$120 billion tax cut (even if spread over three years) could produce an inflationary outburst that would dwarf anything we have seen up to now." For Stein's views, see "The Real Reasons for a Tax Cut," *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 1978, p. 20. Defending Roth and Kemp was Paul Craig Roberts, who commented, "As the adage goes, it is hard to teach old dogs new tricks, and Keynesians, who have spent four decades thinking in terms of spending and demand, find it hard to understand

arguments about incentive and supply." See his "The Economic Case for Kemp-Roth," *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 1978, p. 16.

41. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

Communist Economies & Economic Transformation



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From 1993, the cover of *Communist Economies & Economic Transformation* is giving an increase in the visual prominence of Economic Transformation. The reason is not artistic second thoughts but a wish to emphasise more clearly what has now become the focus of the journal. Most former Communist Economies can no longer be meaningfully described by that term, and even the laggards outside Europe are showing increasing signs of recognition that they must change.

At the same time the early optimism of 1990 has given way to, at best, sober recognition that the Economic Transformation process is going to take much longer and be much harder than at first realised. The problem of Economic Transformation is much larger and more complex than it may initially have seemed. It is generally divided into stabilisation, liberalisation and privatisation. All these are of course interconnected, and that is part of the difficulty. They are all going to require constant attention from policy makers and their advisers, whose measures in turn need to be based on analysis of the economics and politics of the Transformation process. It is to this analysis that *Communist Economies & Economic Transformation* contributes by publishing the key research and policy articles in the field.

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THE CASE FOR CULTURAL THEORY:
REPLY TO FRIEDMAN

In an essay in these pages, Jeffrey Friedman charged that Cultural Theory obscures the unity and uniqueness of modern egalitarian individualism; reduces culture to society; ignores history; is only applicable to contemporary, Western politics; provides an unsatisfactory account of preference formation and preference change; and leaves no place for the vitally important debate over what we should prefer. Although some of Friedman's criticisms stem from a misreading or strained reading of Cultural Theory, others raise vitally important questions not only about Cultural Theory but social theory generally. My reply to Friedman offers not just a defense of the particular categorization of cultures used in Cultural Theory, but a defense of the entire enterprise of constructing general social theories that seek to discern transhistorical patterns in the all too evident diversity and contingency of history.

Jeffrey Friedman's critical review of *Cultural Theory* provides a welcome and apparently necessary opportunity to clarify what Cultural Theory does and does not claim.¹ Friedman levies a number of serious charges against Cultural Theory, the most important of which are that it (1) obscures the unity and uniqueness of modern egalitarian individ-

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ualism, (2) reduces culture to society, (3) elevates theory at the expense of history, and (4) and is only applicable to contemporary, Western politics. These failings, Friedman contends, mean that Cultural Theory provides an inadequate account of the formation of political preferences.

I take up each of these charges in turn, showing that Cultural Theory does not neglect the important connection between individualism and egalitarianism, and that Cultural Theory is neither reductionist, ahistorical, nor presentist. Moreover, I show that the alternative theses offered by Friedman (the “end of history,” the complete autonomy of culture in modern society, history shorn of social theory, and the tradition/modernity dichotomy) are inadequate. Whatever the inadequacies of Cultural Theory, it offers a much better understanding of preference formation than anything presented by Friedman.

After defending the methodological strategy, logical coherence, and empirical validity of Cultural Theory (while at the same time acknowledging those areas where more theoretical and empirical work needs to be done), I conclude by addressing what I consider to be Friedman’s most profound objection against Cultural Theory (and the objection that I believe explains much of the passion behind Friedman’s critique). If preferences are socially determined, Friedman asks, then where does that leave individual morality? If “my culture made me do it,” how can I be held accountable for my actions? How can we argue about the rightness or wrongness of preferences? Does Cultural Theory, like “libertarian liberalism,” foreclose the important normative debate about what we *should* prefer? Here is a query that warrants serious reflection. First, though, to Friedman’s critique of the empirical validity of Cultural Theory.

Are Individualism and Egalitarianism Inseparable?

Friedman takes *Cultural Theory* to task for describing an adversarial relationship between egalitarianism and individualism when these “ideals” are, in fact, “inseparable” and “inextricable.”² They are inseparable, Friedman argues, because individualism contains a belief in the equal worth of all human beings and because egalitarianism is premised on individual freedom. “Equal individual freedom,” an ideal which “attributes equal moral worth and *equal moral authority* to all individuals per se,” is the defining mark of modern Western society.³ Because these ideals are inextricably fused in modern society (and absent altogether

in premodern society), Friedman prefers instead to speak of a single culture that he labels “egalitarian individualism.”⁴

Friedman elaborates his position in a previous two-part essay, “The New Consensus.” Friedman accepts Francis Fukuyama’s thesis that “the end of history” has arrived, arguing that the “ideal of equal individual liberty” now has “no universally plausible competitors.”⁵ But where Fukuyama dates the end of history from the collapse of Communism, Friedman argues that even Communism as it was lived (because it necessarily included market mechanisms in order to survive) and in its inspiration (because it echoed the ideals of the French Revolution) was part of the same egalitarian individualistic culture. “In Hegelian terms,” Friedman explains, “Marxism, egalitarian socialism, and the values they embody are themselves aspects of the World Spirit; their dominance of post-Revolutionary Thought is a manifestation not of threats to the Idea but of its emergence to self-consciousness.”⁶ In non-Hegelian terms, Marxian socialism is just one expression of the Western tradition of egalitarian individualism.

History, Friedman argues, “ended long ago.” How long ago is difficult to say, but Friedman suggests, following Hegel, that “1806 has much to be said for it, inasmuch as the main challenge modern individualism has faced was from the hierarchical, anti-egalitarian values of the *ancien régime*.”⁷ Napoleon’s defeat of the Prussian monarchy at the Battle of Jena is singled out because it signifies “the defeat of the forces of hereditary privilege by those of individual freedom,”⁸ and thus marks “the victory of the ideals of the French Revolution.”⁹

Even if one accepts Friedman’s proposition that the ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—have routed the hierarchical values of the *ancien régime*, it does not follow that there has been an end of history, in the sense of competing ends or visions of the good life. For the conflict between liberty and fraternity remains at the center of contemporary cultural struggles, as does the conflict over the meaning of equality. More to the point, far from being a weakness of Cultural Theory, the ascendancy of equality and liberty as cultural ideals in the modern era demonstrate the theory’s power.

The triumph of liberal modernity over traditional hierarchy is hardly a novel theme in the social sciences. Indeed one of the aims of *Cultural Theory* (in Part II) was to show just how extensively this dichotomy informed the thinking of the great social theorists of the nineteenth century. Set aside for the moment the troubling anomalies presented by this dichotomy (more on which later),¹⁰ and let us assume for the purposes of argument that Friedman is essentially correct that

modern ideals of equality and liberty have decisively triumphed over the hierarchical ideals of traditional societies. If modernity has triumphed over tradition, then there is little that the tradition/modernity dichotomy can tell us about variation within modern (or, for that matter, traditional) societies. When people in modern societies differ in their preferences, we must look elsewhere for an explanation.

One such place to look is Cultural Theory. Cultural Theory need not dispute the importance of the transition from tradition to modernity. (What Cultural Theory does deny is that we moderns escape social constraints on cognition, a point I return to later). In the grid-group model, this transition would be depicted as a move down grid, away from a social environment in which interaction among individuals is strictly regulated and all members know their station toward a social context allowing greater individual freedom to negotiate relationships with others. Such a transition, as social theorists from Tönnies to Parsons have stressed, is of immense world-historical importance. What Cultural Theory offers that the tradition/modernity dichotomy does not is a second dimension of individuation—group—that allows us to discern competing ways of life within what is commonly labeled modernity. To derive the egalitarian mode of organization from social dimensions that can also produce the more familiar categories of market individualism and hierarchy is, as we say in *Cultural Theory*, one of the major contributions of Mary Douglas's grid-group typology.¹¹

The decline (though not the demise) of hierarchy, from the perspective of Cultural Theory, signals not the end of history but a change in the central axis of conflict. Hierarchy's decline (to the uneven extent it has occurred) means not individualism's hegemony but an intensified conflict between individualism and egalitarianism. Cultural Theory thus enables one both to understand the transition to modernity *and* to understand what is arguably the central conflict of modernity, that between individualism and egalitarianism.

Contrary to Friedman, Cultural Theory does not deny the existence of important commonalities between individualism and egalitarianism. Indeed the theory *highlights* these commonalities. Both egalitarianism and individualism, the theory holds, wish to free the individual from the structured differences and ranks of hierarchy. In the less than felicitous language of the typology, both are "low grid" ways of life. This means, to use Friedman's language, that they share a belief in "equal and individual freedom." But Cultural Theory goes beyond

what egalitarianism and individualism share, and identifies also what divides them.

At the most fundamental level, according to Cultural Theory, what divides individualists from egalitarians is the extent to which adherents of the respective ways of life wish their lives to be bounded by a collectivity. Egalitarianism differs from individualism in its effort to integrate the individual into a caring collectivity. Solidarity or fraternity is valued highly by egalitarians; the freedom to bid and bargain is given pride of place by individualists. Egalitarians condemn individualism for isolating the individual from the community, dimming the sense of collective purpose, and damming the springs of civic virtue; individualists criticize egalitarianism for stifling individual initiative, infringing on individual liberty, and neglecting the need for wealth creation.

Both individualists and egalitarians value equality, but their agreement on the word masks fundamental disagreement over its meaning.¹² The individualist defines equality in terms of process; the egalitarian defines equality in terms of outcomes or results. For the individualist, equality is about what James Fishkin calls “procedural fairness,” the same rules for everyone; for the egalitarian, equality means substantive fairness, roughly similar outcomes for everyone (or, what amounts to the same thing, equal life chances at every stage of the process).¹³ Consequently, virtually all differences between people are suspect for egalitarians, while individualists (given equal rules) defend inequalities as a reflection of individual worth.

It is always possible to say, as Friedman seems to want to do, that these are not *meaningful* or *real* conflicts between ways of life but only conflicts or “tensions within the liberal consensus.”¹⁴ Those familiar with American historiography will recognize this as the standard move of consensus history à la Louis Hartz. Hartzians, as Daniel Rodgers has recently written, “prevailed [over the Beardians] by raising the stakes of what counts as *meaningful* conflict, until every conceivable demonstration of conflict short of Jacobin or Bolshevik revolution vanished in the all-pervasive liberal consensus.”¹⁵ Friedman pursues the same strategy in defending “the end of history” thesis. There is no such thing, Friedman asserts, as a “socialist system” that is “*fundamentally* different” from capitalism.”¹⁶ But how helpful is it to think of Stalinism, as Friedman wants us to do, as simply “capitalism with a bureaucratic face?”¹⁷ Or how illuminating is it to label all Western thought “libertarian” so that not just Marx becomes a libertarian because “he sought individual freedom from coercion,”¹⁸ but even

Foucault, who “despite his problematization of the very notion of the individual,” is seen as a libertarian because “he shares the hostility of many liberals to the state and to other agents of modern power.”¹⁹

When writer Christa Wolf pleads for “a new East Germany, separate from the Federal Republic, a society of ‘solidarity,’ ‘social justice,’ and the ‘freedom of the individual,’” Friedman takes this as evidence of “the emergence to consciousness . . . of egalitarian individualism.” I would instead take it as evidence of the need to carefully distinguish between egalitarianism and individualism, for Wolf is affirming egalitarianism (low grid and high group) not competitive individualism.²⁰ Far from signaling the end of history, Wolf’s comment is a reminder that the battle between egalitarianism and individualism continues even in the post-cold war world.

Is this a *meaningful* difference? I think so, or is there no meaningful difference between the radical egalitarianism of the Khmer Rouge and the competitive individualism of Hong Kong? Try explaining that to the people of Cambodia. Friedman’s stretching to include Marxism and free-market libertarianism under the rubric of egalitarian individualism leads us well into what Giovanni Sartori describes as “the Hegelian night” in which “all the cows look black (and eventually the milkman is taken for a cow).”²¹

Is there no meaningful difference between today’s multiculturalists and their opponents? Evidently Friedman thinks not. Friedman accents “the similarities between the logic of . . . [free-market] libertarianism and that of multiculturalism.” Both “rhetorically, at least, . . . seek the one and only libertarian goal: equal self-actualization.”²² Even when trying “to shape students’ preferences so as to prevent them from oppressing each other in the future,” multiculturalists are libertarians for “what constitutes oppression for them is precisely the violation of people’s equal right to individual liberty.”²³ Both free marketers and multiculturalists, in short, are manifestations of the same modern culture of equal individual liberty.

One can concede that multiculturalism (like Marxism) is quintessentially Western in many ways,²⁴ yet it would be a huge mistake to neglect the ways in which proponents of multiculturalism reject individualism in the name of egalitarian community. Rather than honoring people on the basis of what they achieve, multiculturalism celebrates people on the basis of the group to which they belong. In place of color blindness as an ideal, multiculturalism would substitute treating people on the basis of their race or ethnicity.²⁵ In the name of community, multiculturalists would place restrictions on speech that they

believe intimidated or offended minority groups.²⁶ In place of procedurally fair tests, multiculturalism would substitute a results-oriented definition of fairness in which only tests that allowed every ethnic group to perform equally well would be deemed fair.²⁷ Rather than accrediting agencies that base their decisions solely on a university's academic excellence, multiculturalists would prefer accrediting decisions also be based on the institution's pursuit of social justice and racial balance.²⁸ In place of individual achievement as the criterion for college admission, multiculturalists want admission (and, in some cases, graduation) proportional to group membership.²⁹ And on and on.

Multiculturalism's antipathy to individualism is evident in the statement by the college administrator who informed a student that the word "individual" is "a 'Red Flag' phrase today, which many consider racist. . . . Arguments that champion the individual over the group," the administrator explained, "ultimately privilege the 'individuals' belonging to the largest or dominant group."³⁰ The individualist critic of multiculturalism poses the question differently, but equally starkly: "Do we want to protect the rights of individuals or those of communities? We cannot have both."³¹ Even if hierarchy as a powerful, motivating ideal in the West is history (something I do not believe), the end of history would still be nowhere in sight.³² For the struggle between the package of social relations and ideals associated with competitive individualism and the competing package associated with egalitarian community goes on. Those who believe that the battle is unimportant (because there's not any *real* difference between these cultures) or that the outcome of the battle is foreordained (because history has come to an end) will have to forgive the rest of us for acting and theorizing as if the conflict mattered and its result is not a foregone conclusion.

Is Modern Culture Autonomous?

Perhaps the most striking of Friedman's propositions is that "in modern Western society, cultural ideals are, for the most part, quite unrelated to variations in social ways of life." "Culture has assumed an autonomy" today that means "there is virtually no correspondence any more between the cultural biases that have subsequently evolved and contemporary social forms."³³ Can it really be that the social institutions in which we live have so little effect on how we think, and that how we think has so little effect on the institutions we create? It is one

thing to suggest that Mary Douglas's categories of grid and group are the wrong ones, incoherent, or for whatever reason inadequate; it is quite another to suggest that the whole enterprise of exploring the relationship between social relations and cultural biases is misguided.

Friedman's position will come as something of a rude shock to social historians and intellectual historians who over the past two decades have seemed to reach an understanding that their enterprises must be joined, a marriage that has been consummated in part under the rubric of cultural history.³⁴ Intellectual history without social history, as in the case of the American Studies Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, produced the ultimately barren pursuit of "a disembodied national mind."³⁵ If free-floating ideas were inadequate, so too was a social history that discounted ideas altogether. Social history without a history of ideas led to a history with little sense of how individuals understand the world they experienced and a history that was unconnected to national politics. Friedman's defense of "cultural history" turns out, upon closer inspection, to attack the very union of the social and the ideational that has facilitated the burgeoning field of cultural history.

Friedman's contention will also raise eyebrows among proponents of the historicist or contextualist movement in the study of political ideas. For historicists like Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, contextualism means not just situating texts in their historical context but also in their social context.³⁶ Contextualism has its problems, particularly in its insistence that there are no timeless concepts, only "the various different concepts which have gone with various different societies,"³⁷ a position that often impedes cross-cultural comparison by producing a bewildering diversity of concepts and social relations. But Friedman's position does not remedy this excess, while it also jettisons the important contribution this school of thought has made in connecting concepts and ideas to the social setting within which they emerge.

Surprised, too, will be the great nineteenth-century social theorists, all of whom believed that the relationship between social relations and ideas lay at the core of the sociological enterprise. This is obviously true of Durkheim, from whom Mary Douglas takes her cue, but it is also true of Marx and even Weber. Weber, to be sure, dissented from Marx's crude reduction of ideas to economics, but he also stressed the "elective affinities" between how people lived and how people viewed the world.³⁸

That Friedman's position would surprise many people does not

mean that it is wrong, but it does help to see that in this respect if in no other, Cultural Theory is fairly staid and conventional. More controversial, and thus more in need of defense, is our thesis that the particular types of social relations that we identify are related to particular types of cultural bias. What is the evidence for such a connection?

Some support for the hypothesized affinity between social relationships and cultural biases is provided by a survey that a class of mine recently carried out of nine groups: abortion rights activists, pro-life activists, Democratic precinct workers, car salesmen, university students, professors, Catholic priests, homeless people, and prison inmates. Using a six-item fatalism scale—There is no use in doing things for people, you only get it in the neck in the long run; The future is too uncertain for a person to make serious plans; No matter how hard people try, fate largely determines the outcome; A person is better off if he or she does not trust anyone; Failure is mostly a matter of bad luck; People like me don't have any say about what government does—we found that less than 4 percent of the nonprison population answered more than two of the fatalism items in the affirmative. Among Democratic party activists, Catholic priests, abortion rights activists, and pro-life activists, no respondent answered more than one of the fatalist items in the affirmative, and over nine in ten of these respondents rejected all six of the statements. Among prisoners (all of whom were repeat offenders), in contrast, roughly three-quarters answered three or more of the fatalist items in the affirmative, and over half assented to four or more of the statements.

This finding suggests a strong relationship between the social environment of atomized subordination characteristic of a prison and adherence to a fatalistic cultural bias.³⁹ One might object that this finding is the exception that proves the rule. For it is precisely the atypical character of a prison, in which individuals are completely walled off from alternative institutions, that allows the relationship between social relations and cultural bias to emerge. Let us try another example then.

The seminal work of historian Eugene Genovese provides further support for Cultural Theory's thesis of social constraint. Genovese shows that the social relations of the master-slave relationship generated a hierarchical or paternal ideology among many Southern slaveholders, an ideology antithetical to the egalitarian and competitive individualist currents prevalent in the North.⁴⁰ The slaveholding experience, as depicted by Genovese, contradicts Friedman's claim that "by the modern era" there had emerged "an ideal that was plausible to

people regardless of their social ways of life: the ideal of individual equality, which attributes equal moral worth and equal moral authority to all individuals *per se*."⁴¹ It might be objected that slave owners, too, are the exception that proves the rule. For it is these kinds of clear, unmistakable differences in ways of life (slave versus market society) that disappear once the transition to modernity is completed.

Perhaps neither of these examples meet Friedman head on because his primary contention is "that modern 'egalitarianism' thrives in the same cosmopolitan social context as does modern 'individualism.'"⁴² Egalitarians and individualists may be distinguishable in terms of certain values (although not *fundamental* values), Friedman suggests, but their social relationships are identical. Friedman offers little in the way of evidence to support this hypothesis, but rather seems to regard it as a self-evident truth. Let me try to introduce some evidence that social context does make a difference.

Returning to the aforementioned survey, Cultural Theory would predict that car salesmen, whose social relations are constituted by continual bidding and bargaining, would be the most likely to exhibit a strong individualistic bias. This is exactly what the data show. Among car salesmen, almost 90 percent answered three or more of the six individualism items in the affirmative.⁴³ Among the other eight groups surveyed, only 46 percent of the respondents showed the same level of support for competitive individualist values.⁴⁴

Nor is it difficult to show that radical egalitarian values are frequently associated with institutions that are high group and low grid. Activists in the civil rights movements of the 1960s not only espoused egalitarian values but structured their lives in an egalitarian way, combining tightly bounded groups⁴⁵ with a rejection of formal authority structures. A similar egalitarian packaging of social relations and values can be found in antinuclear and environmental movements,⁴⁶ feminist groups,⁴⁷ and free schools.⁴⁸ Certainly one would be hard pressed to think of too many traders on the futures market who share the radically egalitarian worldview of these groups.

Friedman's objection to this type of counterexample is that it proves nothing about the social constraint on cognition because it is not the social relations that account for the values but the values that account for the social relations.⁴⁹ This is important because here is an area where modern societies are arguably qualitatively different from pre-modern societies. In premodern societies, one is usually born into an organization; in modern societies one more often joins an organization. Certainly this is the case with the egalitarian social movement

organizations of the contemporary era. To argue that concerns about certain types of risks, for example, stem from organizing groups in certain ways does seem to beg the question of how people got into the group in the first place.

But if the individual decision to join a particular group cannot be explained as a product of that particular group's social relations, neither does an individual come to that decision in a social vacuum. The individual's decision to join is already embedded in a preferred set of social relations and values stemming from family, work, friends, and school.

Moreover, once the individual joins a group, the group's social relations often explain a great deal about the subsequent evolution of the individual's belief system. Cultural Theory focuses in part on choices that are made (to use Marx's phrase) "behind the back" of the individual as a result of structuring one's life in a particular way. As Mary Douglas writes, "When one chooses how one wants to be dealt with and how to deal with others, it is just as well to be clear as to what else may be unintentionally chosen."⁵⁰ So, for instance, people choose to structure their social relations in a manner consistent with their egalitarian bias (cultural bias → social relations) but end up having a hard time keeping the group together in the absence of authority and so demonize the outside world (social relations + cultural bias [way of life] → cultural bias) to prevent members from exiting the group.

Friedman caricatures our view as positing a causal arrow running only from social relations to ideas, and then proceeds to replace it with an equally one-sided model in which ideas determine social relations. So, for instance, he criticizes our interpretation of abolitionism on the grounds that "it was not the small social groups that led to the abolitionist ideology, but the ideology that sometimes led to the formation of the groups."⁵¹ I see no reason to pose the question in such a stark either-or way, and *Cultural Theory* is explicit on the need not to. On the first page we write:

Causal priority, in our conception of ways of life, is given neither to cultural bias nor to social relations. Relations and biases are reciprocal, interacting, and mutually reinforcing: Adherence to a certain pattern of social relationships generates a distinctive way of looking at the world; adherence to a certain worldview legitimizes a corresponding type of social relations. As in the case of the chicken and the egg, it is sufficient to show that cultural biases and social relations are responsible for one another, without confronting the issue of which came first.⁵²

Cultural Theory, then, is far from exhibiting the “social monocausalism” Friedman attributes to it.⁵³

A large part of Friedman’s confusion on this point is due to a misreading of our definition of “way of life.” He interprets “way of life” to be equivalent to social relations despite our explicit definition, again on page 1: “*Cultural bias* refers to shared values and beliefs. *Social relations* are defined as patterns of interpersonal relations. When we wish to designate a viable combination of social relations and cultural bias we speak of a *way of life*.”⁵⁴ Friedman’s misreading explains the puzzling endnote in which he quotes *Cultural Theory* to the effect that causal priority is given neither to social relations nor cultural bias, and then cites the following passage as evidence that we in fact “do accord initial causal priority to society over culture.” The passage reads: “The problem we have set for ourselves is not one of origins—when and how did ways of life emerge? It is instead a problem of persistence—how, having come into being, does a *way of life* sustain itself (and change)?”⁵⁵ Since our definition of way of life includes both social relations and cultural bias, such a statement absolutely does not accord priority to social relations over cultural bias. When *Cultural Theory* speaks of preferences being derived from ways of life, we are not saying that social relations determine culture, but rather that social relations and cultural bias together shape preferences.

Only part of the disagreement between Friedman and ourselves can be attributed to definitional misunderstandings, however. The larger part relates to Friedman’s tendency to fix analysis at the level of “society,” as, for instance, when he faults Cultural Theory for not seeing that it is “possible . . . for egalitarians to participate in a competitive, individualistic *society* while deploring it,” or when he asserts that “bourgeois society has always produced not only its champions but its most dedicated enemies.”⁵⁶ Friedman ignores or rejects a primary objective of Cultural Theory, which is to avoid talking about “society” as if it were all of a piece.

Cultural Theory, Friedman suggests, is implausible on its face because “the egalitarian mindset describes not just the worldview of the minuscule number of egalitarians raised on communes, but also that of the hundreds of millions who are raised in nuclear families, who themselves found such families, and who are full participants in market economies.”⁵⁷ Friedman’s formulation obscures, however, the very great differences between being a trader on Wall Street, a letter sorter in the federal post office, a founder of a small, start-up computer company, and a middle-level executive in a large corporation. Each of

these jobs is characterized by widely different social relations—the furious bidding and bargaining of the low-grid, low-group trader, the highly routinized, prescribed work of the post office employee, the unstructured but collegial environment of the small computer firm, and the hierarchical rules and procedures facing the corporate executive. That each of these jobs exists in what can be termed a market society does not mean that each involves the worker in the same or even similar social relations.⁵⁸

Similarly, the term “nuclear family” obscures a tremendous variety of social relations. Some nuclear families are structured hierarchically: father knows best, and male and female roles are clearly demarcated and separated. Others are organized along more egalitarian lines: children have a large role in family decisionmaking, and spouses share household chores and child-rearing duties. Still other nuclear families are characterized by physical violence, intimidation, and fear. Individuals in this society thus differ greatly in the social relations and values they encounter within the nuclear family.⁵⁹ It is an empirical question, of course, whether people from egalitarian families tend to bring the values and social relations of their upbringing to other aspects of their lives, but the connection between egalitarian social relations and egalitarian values is not, as Friedman seems to think, nonsensical or self-evidently false.

This leads us to what is arguably the most serious methodological difficulty in applying Cultural Theory to a modern setting. The problem is not, as Friedman suggests, that almost everyone in modern society partakes of the same social relations, but rather that almost everyone in modern society participates in such diverse social relations. If, as we say in *Cultural Theory*, “it is characteristic of modern society that individuals find themselves in different social contexts in different areas of their lives,”⁶⁰ then how can one predict cultural bias from social relations? If one can work in a hierarchical organization from 9 to 5, come home to a family organized along egalitarian lines, and purchase goods in a competitive market, then how is one to falsify predictions? Whatever cultural bias an individual adheres to, there would seem to be a corresponding set of social relations that can be invoked to explain the cultural bias.

Among the most interesting questions for future research is to investigate how people who find themselves in radically different institutional contexts in different areas of their lives deal with it. How, for instance, do those who prefer egalitarianism cope with working in a large-scale hierarchical bureaucracy, where decisions are handed down

from on high with little or no participation? How do those who identify with competitive individualism react to the army's prescribed rules, regulations, and timetables? Does the experience of serving in the army transform one's views in other areas of one's life, or is the experience compartmentalized? Are people with hierarchical preferences more likely to be attracted to joining the army? Are those from less authoritarian families likely to have a more difficult time adjusting to army life?⁶¹ How, to take another example, do people who prefer a highly egalitarian home life reconcile this with their participation in a competitive marketplace? Are the two realms compartmentalized, or is there an attempt to make the norms applied in economic life more consistent than norms employed in the family?⁶² "The challenge for future research," as we say in *Cultural Theory*, "lies in specifying conditions under which one [response] is more likely than the other."⁶³ This challenge is important whether or not one accepts the specific categorization offered in *Cultural Theory*.

Modern society, in sum, does pose peculiar problems for Cultural Theory, although not necessarily the ones Friedman identifies. These are difficulties, however, that are not peculiar to Cultural Theory; rather they confront any theory that attempts to relate how people live with how people think. Rejecting Cultural Theory will not make the problem go away. The path of connecting cognition and social relations may be fraught with methodological dangers and empirical difficulties, but I believe it is a path that social scientists cannot avoid if they are to help us understand the modern world in which we live.

Is Cultural Theory Ahistorical?

One of Friedman's central complaints is that *Cultural Theory* ignores history. "For some reason," Friedman laments, "it is not to history that Wildavsky et al. turn in their search for the sources of our preferences. Instead, they look to theory."⁶⁴ Friedman need not have wondered at our reasons; they are explicitly stated. Anticipating the objection, we wrote, "If a theory's fruitfulness can be gauged only through its empirical payoff . . . why, the reader may wonder, aside from numerous illustrations, have we not done that here? Because, we answer, our strategic judgment is that at this stage exposition of the theory ought to be our first priority."⁶⁵ That we made that strategic judgment at that time does not mean that we think theory is more important than

history, and it certainly does not mean that we believe one should turn to theory instead of history.⁶⁶

This answer does not meet Friedman's real objection, however, which is not that *Cultural Theory* slights history but that Cultural Theory is inherently ahistorical. "The problem," according to Friedman, "lies in the very nature of their project: the ambition to create a social theory of culture rather than *simply to do cultural history*."⁶⁷ Our "fateful turn away from history" began the moment we embarked on an attempt to build a cultural theory. "This initial choice guaranteed an ahistorical outcome."⁶⁸

Is social theory inherently ahistorical? In practice, no doubt much of it is. In sociology, the grand theory of Talcott Parsons no less than the quantitative sociology championed by Herbert Blalock tended to sever links between historical research and theoretical synthesis.⁶⁹ In political science, Charles Merriam and others led a "behavioral revolution" that rejected unscientific history for the harder stuff of psychology and statistics.⁷⁰ Both of the early giants of British social anthropology, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, were avowedly hostile toward history, particularly the crude evolutionary doctrines of nineteenth-century social science and the efforts to seek explanations of current practices and beliefs deep in the shrouded past. If this was history, they wanted none of it.⁷¹

In the last several decades, however, the rigid divide separating history and theory has begun to break down across the social sciences. Three decades ago, E. E. Evans-Pritchard signaled the arrival of a new anthropological sensibility vis-à-vis history when he suggested that functionalists "should have challenged [the evolutionists] not for writing history, but for writing bad history." History without theory, Evans-Pritchard insisted, is uninterpretable because "events lose much, even all, of their meaning if they are not seen as having some degree of regularity and constancy, as belonging to a certain type of event, all instances of which have many features in common." And theory without history is empty for "if the specificity of a fact is lost, the generalization about it becomes so general as to be valueless."⁷²

Political science has recently seen an explosion of interest in the relationship between history and political theory, as the newly created "History and Politics" sections of the American Political Science Association and Western Political Science Association as well as new journals such as *Studies in American Political Development* and *Journal of Policy History* testify.⁷³ Sociology, too, has seen a tremendous revival of interest in the connections between history and social theory. In addition to

a recently formed historical section of the American Sociological Association, nearly a quarter of the articles in the main sociological journals deal with historical topics, using historical data.⁷⁴

By suggesting that we must choose between theory and history (the subtitle of Friedman's critique is "Cultural Theory vs. Cultural History"), Friedman returns the debate to the impasse of the past. Forced to choose one side or the other, proponents hunker down in their respective camps, exchange a flurry of shots, score the occasional hit, but never move beyond their entrenched positions. Rather than see history as theory's antagonist, I prefer to conceive of history as the field upon which theory is tested, created, refined, reformulated, confirmed, and rejected. Good history makes for more powerful theories, and more powerful theories enhance our understanding of the past as well our ability to predict the future.⁷⁵

As one who defines his own research interests as operating at the intersection of political science and history, I certainly would want no part of a theory that cut itself off from history. In my own work I have found Cultural Theory to be an extremely useful tool for illuminating the past. In *Dilemmas of Presidential Leadership: From Washington through Lincoln*, for instance, Wildavsky and I have used Cultural Theory to understand past presidents in terms of the recurring cultural dilemmas they face. Outside of developmental accounts, which show how the contemporary presidency evolved out of the traditional presidency, *Dilemmas* offers one of the few efforts to relate the experiences of past presidents to the experiences of contemporary presidents.⁷⁶

Portraying Cultural Theory as oblivious to history takes some doing given our explicit insistence that "without theory, history cannot speak; without history, theory is dumb."⁷⁷ Friedman does, to be fair, acknowledge our effort to specify the role of history in Cultural Theory. "Only history," we argue, "can tell us which means or instruments of policy are available and which ones will, based on the experience of these particular people, be seen as relevant to their circumstances." Friedman rejects this formulation as inadequate because "this is to admit that where the selection not of means but of ends—i.e. of preferences—is concerned, history is irrelevant."⁷⁸ Yes and no. Yes, the fundamental sociocultural objective—to further one's way of life—remains constant over time. Were we to allow history to intrude into the definition of the ultimate end (the way of life) the categories would become so diffuse and indeterminate as to vitiate the theory altogether.⁷⁹ No, a preference can be inserted into a means-end reasoning chain without making it any the less a preference. The Jacksonians'

preference for limited government, for instance, can be explained by (1) their commitment to a way of life based on relatively equal conditions, and (2) the historically contingent belief that government was a source of inequality. In the twentieth century, as the historically contingent belief changed such that government was viewed as an agent of increasing inequality, egalitarians began to prefer an activist government. That a preference regarding the scope and size of government intervention may be explained by conceptualizing that preference as a means to another end does not mean it is not a preference.

If Friedman's objection is largely wide of the mark, the question of historical context does raise serious methodological problems for Cultural Theory. To acknowledge the importance of history and context in shaping people's preferences is easy enough; more difficult is to delimit the types of historical situations and contexts so that historical context does not become an escape hatch that saves the theory when things don't come out as the theory predicts. I agree with Peter Knapp that "social science can achieve [falsifiable theory] only if dependencies of regularities upon milieu and context are explicitly considered," and that if "an infinite, unlistable number of variables represent conditions under which a theory's lawful regularities hold, it is impossible to state when the regularities will or will not obtain. Such a theory is not falsifiable."⁸⁰ One has to be careful not to let history and context in one door and allow falsifiability out the other.

Cultural Theory does offer some generalizations about the ways in which the behavior of adherents of a way of life will vary depending on the relative strengths of competing ways of life at a given point in time and space. For example, we suggest that egalitarians, when they find themselves at the fringes of society, will be a voice for free expression and will keep up a steady drumbeat of criticism of established authority. But if they become dominant, egalitarians may suddenly insist on undeviating conformity to their collective goal of achieving more equal conditions.⁸¹ Such generalizations are plausible but largely ad hoc. Future work needs to specify more systematically the interaction between cultural bias and historical context.⁸² "Only time will tell," as we concede in *Cultural Theory*, "whether qualification proceeds faster than explanation."⁸³

It may be that subsequent historical inquiry proves Cultural Theory wrong or in need of radical revision. Friedman certainly thinks it will—"the slightest historical investigation," Friedman says, "would falsify the generalizations offered in *Cultural Theory*."⁸⁴ If so, we won't have Cultural Theory to kick around much longer. But we should not

conflate, as Friedman does, the charge that history proves Cultural Theory wrong, and the far different proposition that Cultural Theory, indeed any theory (or social theory) of culture, is inherently ahistorical or antihistorical. If the historical evidence mounts up against Cultural Theory, I can abandon or delimit the particular theory. But I am unwilling, as Friedman asks, "simply to do cultural history" without some theory of culture. In my view, his counsel is a sure recipe for making history antiquarian if not unintelligible.

If Friedman wants to challenge Cultural Theory, it would be better that he challenge it not for being social theory, but for being bad social theory. Universalistic social theory of the Parsonian structural-functional mold, as we show in chapter 10, was bad social theory because it *did* wash out historical variety and dim historical curiosity. But Cultural Theory is cut from a radically different cloth. We do not attempt to formulate propositions that are true of all human behavior, believing that generalizations that do not distinguish between, say, hierarchical systems and egalitarian systems are bound to be either trite or wrong.⁸⁵ The grid-group typology at the heart of Cultural Theory seeks a middle way between the uniqueness of historical events and the generality of universal laws.

Cultural Theory follows not the grandiose universalism of Comte and Parsons but the middle-level typologizing of Weber and Durkheim. Durkheim rejects universal laws in favor of a strategy that recognizes that "between the confused multitude of historic societies and the single, but ideal concept of humanity, there are intermediaries, namely social species."⁸⁶ Weber, too, shuns "master-key statements on the nature of Society" at the same time that he recognizes that "social reality is sufficiently complex as to be unknowable in the absence of theoretical interests that guide construction of one-sided type concepts."⁸⁷ Weber's ideal types, like Durkheim's social species and our ways of life, occupy a middle ground between the uniqueness of concrete history and the universality of covering laws.

There are, it is true, important differences between Weber and Durkheim in their methodological strategies and theoretical aims.⁸⁸ Weber's major goal, as Charles Ragin and David Zaret show, is to provide "genetic explanations of historical diversity."⁸⁹ A genetic explanation, according to philosopher Ernest Nagel, demonstrates "why it is that a given subject of study has certain characteristics, by describing how some structure has evolved out of some earlier one."⁹⁰ This genetic form of explanation, which has as its major aim "historically contextualized knowledge of the origins and consequences of histori-

cal diversity," can be contrasted with a Durkheimian variable-based or functional mode of explanation, which seeks "broad generalizations about systemic relations."⁹¹

Cultural Theory is closer in methodological strategy and theoretical objectives to Durkheim than to Weber. We do not start, as Ragin and Zaret argue a Weberian would, "with an interest in specific historical processes and structures,"⁹² although we certainly expect our theory to illuminate specific historical processes and structures. We start instead with the aim of seeking transhistorical generalizations about types of social systems. Cultural Theory is concerned with history, but is more interested in history as past behavior than history as development.⁹³

Ragin and Zaret make a persuasive case for the essential and irreducible role that genetic or developmental explanations of historical divergence play in social science,⁹⁴ and the historical sociology of Reinhard Bendix, Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, and Perry Anderson, among others, are testimony to the fruits of this methodological approach.⁹⁵ Friedman, however, goes far beyond this unobjectionable claim, calling into question the validity of the entire Durkheimian enterprise of seeking variable-based, transhistorical generalizations. This position seems to me indefensible, and certainly Friedman offers no defense of this sweeping indictment of the social sciences.

Friedman's specific complaint is that Cultural Theory doesn't address the only big question he seems to deem worth asking: "Where did the historically unique configuration of modern, Western capitalism come from?" I do not dispute that understanding the peculiar package of values that emerged in the West is a mightily important undertaking, and that genetic explanation is essential to this task. But, as Nagel points out, different questions call for different types of explanation.⁹⁶ The question of why the English language in its current form has so many words of Latin origin calls for a genetic explanation that accounts for how the current system has developed into its current form from some earlier stage. If, however, we want to know why a smaller percentage of Catholics than Protestants committed suicide in European countries during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, we may offer an explanation, as Durkheim did, that tries to correlate suicide rates with other variables such as the strength of social bonds between members of a community.⁹⁷

If *Cultural Theory* does not tell us as much as one might like about the origins of the West, it tells us a great deal about why people living in the West construct the world so very differently, and about the consequences of those differing social constructions. It tells us why

some modern people “see evil only in institutions and society rather than in our hearts,” while others believe people are inherently sinful and need institutions to restrain and guide their passions.⁹⁸ It tells us why some people believe that “every time you turn on an electric light you are making another brainless baby,”⁹⁹ while others think wetlands are just wasted land. It tells us why some people believe the poor are the downtrodden and oppressed, while others believe they are the shiftless and lazy. These may not be the questions Friedman wants answered, but these are extremely important questions about the modern world in which we live.

Is Cultural Theory Universal?

Can Cultural Theory’s categories be applied to non-Western and/or premodern settings? Friedman says no. Cultural Theory, Friedman maintains, “is grounded in contemporary politics—and contemporary politics alone.”¹⁰⁰ The theory cannot be applied to premodern or non-Western societies, Friedman argues, because in these societies “two of the five cultures—egalitarianism and individualism—were largely, if not entirely, absent.”¹⁰¹ If Friedman is correct, it is quite remarkable that categories devised by an anthropologist for the purpose of understanding “primitive” African tribes end up being a theory applicable only to modern society. Remarkable but not impossible.

Even more remarkable is that Friedman concedes that Cultural Theory’s “fourfold division may mirror contemporary political alignments better than the conventional left-right dichotomy.”¹⁰² One would think this would be cause for celebration, hand stands, drum rolls, Nobel prizes. Here we have a categorization that may be superior to the most widely used categorization in the social sciences for understanding contemporary political conflict. But no such luck. For Cultural Theory takes this “comparative advantage overboard, transforming four blocs of contemporary American public opinion into timeless, placeless cultural universals.” And in the final analysis, Cultural Theory does not “get any closer” to accounting for preferences than does the “libertarian liberal” view that simply posits preferences as given. Indeed, Cultural Theory is really no better than “vulgar Marxism.”¹⁰³ Quite a comedown for a theory that just a moment ago seemed poised to sweep social science off its feet by giving it a new way to understand contemporary political alignments.

As someone who studies American politics and history, I would not

be desperately disappointed if it turned out that the categories of Cultural Theory applied only to the industrializing or industrial societies of the West. There are few social theories that can cover even this much. Limiting the domain of cases to which a theory applies or specifying the conditions under which a theory holds is a fate that awaits all theories upon being subjected to close empirical scrutiny. How far Cultural Theory has to retreat from its claim to universality will depend on subsequent research by those with expertise in non-Western and premodern cultures.

Before beating a hasty retreat from Cultural Theory's claim to universality, however, let us be clear about what is and is not being asserted when we say Cultural Theory is universal. We are not saying that egalitarianism in twentieth-century China looks exactly the same as it does in seventeenth-century England, or that competitive individualism among the Igbo is no different than it is among Americans. In this respect, egalitarianism and individualism are no different from any other terms designed to cross large stretches of time and space, whether capitalism, socialism, liberalism, feudalism, bourgeois, modernity, tradition, charisma, authority, government, class, or revolution. One cannot extend the set to which one applies a term without decreasing the properties that define that term. There is, of course, a legitimate concern whether in "stretching" a concept to cover diverse cases one makes the concept fuzzy or vague.¹⁰⁴ I do not think *Cultural Theory* is guilty of this error, but that must be for others to judge.

The question, then, is not whether they are identical in every way (or even in most ways) but rather whether there are similarities that make it possible to draw comparisons among seemingly disparate phenomena. Take, for instance, our discussion of Lucien Pye's analysis of China's political cultures.¹⁰⁵ Friedman faults us for neglecting that "the premodern cultural ideals seem qualitatively different from their modern variants." For instance, "Chinese egalitarianism, which according to Pye 'glorified the rebel and trusted magical formulas to transform economic and social reality,' hardly seems comparable to the modern version of [egalitarianism]."¹⁰⁶ But comparable with respect to what? Certainly the faith in "elixirs" and "magical formulas" seems different, but is the contemporary egalitarian faith in revolution or radical renovation so very different? Moreover, the hostility to existing economic and social institutions is comparable, as is the egalitarian hostility to "those who thought themselves to be the moral and intellectual betters of the common man."¹⁰⁷ Similar, too, is the wish to

unleash the potential and natural goodness of human beings from oppressive, hierarchical institutions.

I do not pretend to be expert in Chinese politics or history, but it is Pye himself, not the authors of *Cultural Theory*, who draws the link between the egalitarianism of traditional China and the egalitarianism of contemporary Maoism. Pye is aware that the two are not identical phenomena, but he thinks their similarities explain something of the appeal of Maoism. Pye's particular hypothesis may be wrong, but the entire field of political culture is premised on the assumption that one can draw connections between practices and beliefs in the distant past and practices and beliefs in the present. If Friedman objects to comparing modern and premodern political cultures, his complaint is not with *Cultural Theory* alone but with the entire field of political culture.

Friedman is largely correct that outside of the chapter on Banfield and Pye, *Cultural Theory* does not carry out the kind of sustained examination of premodern societies that would be necessary to demonstrate the categories' universality.¹⁰⁸ In part this omission is because, as I have already said, the book is primarily an attempt to explicate the foundations of the theory rather than to validate the theory empirically. But the relative neglect of premodern societies also has to do with the particular areas of expertise and ignorance that the authors brought to the book. Had we been wiser and had more time, Part III would have done more with premodern materials and, in particular, would have done a much better job making the case for the existence of individualism and egalitarianism in premodern settings. The failing, if failing it is, is ours, not the theory's.

Perhaps it might help to give a brief overview of some of the evidence that leads us to believe that the categories of *Cultural Theory* are applicable to premodern and/or non-Western settings. Exhibit number one: the Igbo of southeast Nigeria. The Igbo, at least in Victor Uchendu's telling, sound for all the world like a model of competitive individualism. They believe that "the world is a marketplace where status symbols can be bought." Among the Igbo, moreover, "market prices are determined by a rigorous system of bargaining . . . between a buyer and a seller." Every time a mother goes to the village market, her children give her the "market wish":

Mother, gain from market people;
Market people, lose to mother.

Virtually everything in the Igbo world seems open to individual negotiation, including the individual's relationship with his creator. Uchendu tells us further that "the Igbo world is based on an equalitarian principle"; "what the Igbo mean by an equalitarian society is that which gives to all its citizens an equal opportunity to achieve success. The stress is on achievement."¹⁰⁹

Exhibit number two: the Comanche Indians. The Comanche ideal, E. Adamson Hoebel explains, "is the supremacy and free action of the individual," an ideal that reflected a "hard, fast-moving life in a world of change, in which the individual loomed large as the important social unit." All aspects of Comanche life were open to individual negotiation, including "the waging of war, [which] was a matter of individual initiative." In case of disputes within the tribe, "there was no judge to determine what should be paid in composition for the wrong . . . [and so] the sole way to agreement was bargain."¹¹⁰

Exhibit number three: the Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island. Kwakiutl culture, as Ruth Benedict describes it, was intensely competitive. "Each individual," Benedict tells us, "constantly vied with all others to outdistance themselves in distributions of property." The Kwakiutl "saw life as a ladder" to be scaled through individual exertion. This competitive ethos to prove oneself superior to one's competitors suffused "their social organization, their economic organizations, [even] their religion, birth and death."¹¹¹

Exhibit number four: the Jama'at al-Islamiyya in modern Egypt. Few groups are as militantly anti-Western and antimodern as the Jama'at al-Islamiyya, yet these radical Islamic groups are organized much like radically egalitarian social movement groups in the West. Group ties are "total and indivisible." The internal purity of the group and the cause are maintained by shunning contact with those in the political establishment. Within the groups, reflecting their egalitarian ideology, there are "no systematic lines of authority" nor is there any division of labor.¹¹²

Exhibit number five: the Cherokee Indians. The Cherokee communities, William Hill finds, were strongly committed to egalitarianism. Their villages "operated on a democratic basis; all political decisions were made with the villagers present and taking part." Consensus was the Cherokee decision rule: "Decisions were unanimous or they weren't made." The Cherokee commitment to equality extended beyond political institutions to the social and economic domain: "Women had a nearly equal role to that of men; and there was a

considerable although not complete sharing of goods on the basis of need."¹¹³

The highly competitive and individualistic ways of life of the Igbo, Comanche, and Kwakiutl do not fit the conventional model of traditional societies, in which individual initiative, negotiation, and innovation are supposed to be discouraged if not altogether absent. Somewhat easier to accommodate (because of their high-group context) but still ill fitting are the egalitarian ways of life of the Jama'at al and Cherokee.¹¹⁴ Compared to modernization theory, Cultural Theory is better able to anticipate and to account for these individualistic and egalitarian aspects of non-Western or premodern societies. Looking at the premodern world through the lens of Cultural Theory leads us to expect Brian Tierney's otherwise surprising conclusion that "all through the Middle Ages there were two attitudes—not just one—to the problem of equality and inequality. One could emphasize that hierarchical ranking was necessary in an ordered society; or one could emphasize that, because all men shared a common humanity, they were all by nature equal, and also by nature free (for no one had a natural right to dominate his equals)."¹¹⁵ Nor will a cultural theorist be surprised to find, with Alan Macfarlane, that "the majority of people in England from at least the thirteenth century were rampant individualists, highly mobile both geographically and socially, economically 'rational,' market-oriented and acquisitive."¹¹⁶ Cultural Theory also leads us to anticipate not only Pye's finding of an egalitarian rebel culture in traditional China, but also his finding that even "within Confucianism there were many schools that could have provided the foundations for different patterns of political behavior."¹¹⁷ Cultural Theory's comparative advantage is that it tells one to look for diverse ways of organizing and thinking within what other theories commonly treat as culturally uniform entities—whether at the level of the nation-state, the economy, the polity, or the family.

At one point, Friedman does concede that there have "been many premodern egalitarian societies," and that individualism "as a social phenomenon" can be found throughout history. But as "a cultural ideal," he insists, neither individualism nor egalitarianism can "be found outside of the modern West." Cultural Theory neglects what to Friedman is of critical importance about modernity: the emergence of individualism and egalitarianism as "universalistic" ideals.¹¹⁸

Questions could be raised about Friedman's hypothesis. Is it true, for instance, that only egalitarians and individualists in the modern West have thought that their way of life should be universalized, that

is, suitable not just for themselves but for others? Did premodern societies fight solely over material interests and raw political power, while only modern societies fight about cultural ideals? What are we to make of the virulently anti-Western and antimodern, but powerfully universalistic appeals of Islam? And what about the modern West's own powerful brand of particularism and relativism? My real aim here, however, is not to criticize Friedman's category of universalism, but rather to invite Friedman to build a typology of cultures that incorporates such a variable. We can then do what is so rarely done in the social sciences: compare theories. Rather than hold up Cultural Theory to impossibly high standards of perfection, we might use the more attainable yardstick of how Cultural Theory stacks up against rival conceptualizations.

Cultural Theory admits that the grid-group typology is a "rough-and-ready frame of measurement." It is deliberately so for "it is not aimed at filling in all the fine, specific detail of an individual's social environment but, rather, at sketching a broad picture that, thanks to its lack of particularistic detail, can be compared to others from widely different historical settings."¹¹⁹ Some may feel, with justification, that it is too rough an instrument, too broad a brush. Generalization, as John McKinney points out, "means omission and simplification of particularities; consequently as a type effects wide coverage, its adequacy in accounting for specific variations is lessened." This does not mean that general types are not useful. Rather it takes "account of the fact that more specific types must be used in conjunction with them for many explanatory purposes."¹²⁰

Theory is, by its very nature, presumptuous, even outrageous. What could be more presumptuous than to predict human behavior that has not yet even occurred? Godlike, it claims to create "order out of the potential chaos of discrete, discontinuous, or heterogeneous observations."¹²¹ For Cultural Theory's presumptuousness we do not apologize. Cultural Theory lives by Whitehead's aphorism to seek simplicity and distrust it. Many of Cultural Theory's critics seem to prefer to seek complexity or contingency and, of course, they do not have to look far to find it. Our critics assume that other things are never equal and ought not to be treated as if they were; we assume that other things are never equal but that the world can only be understood if they are treated as if they are.¹²² I rather like Samuel Beer's suggestion that "the universalist doctrine can be very useful if taken in the right spirit. That is, if we think of it as a kind of utopia which urges us continually to try to develop and expand the generality of our hypoth-

eses."¹²³ Universal social theory may be utopian, but it is a utopia human beings can ill afford to do without if they are to make sense of the "buzzing, blooming confusion" of their world.

Can Cultural Theory Account for Preferences?

In the final analysis, Friedman concludes, "Cultural Theory [does not] . . . get any closer to finding out [the] sources [of preferences] than . . . the libertarian liberal view, in which preferences are ends determined automatically by the inner self."¹²⁴ How can it be that Cultural Theory gets us no closer to accounting for political preferences than theories that do not even make an effort to account for preferences? Friedman's answer: Cultural Theory's deterministic account of preference formation is question-begging, and its atomistic explanation of preference change is at best naive rationalism, at worst nonsensical.

Friedman objects to our "sociological answer" to the question of preferences (i.e., ways of life determine preferences), because rather than answer the question, "it *merely* moves the question of 'given' preferences back a level, from the individual to the [way of life]."¹²⁵ But as anyone who has ever had a conversation with a young child knows, there is always a "but why?" question waiting behind every answer. Persistent children can always push the question back to the point where parents are left stammering, yet few parents would therefore conclude that their answers were meaningless or their knowledge worthless.

To say that Cultural Theory "merely" pushes the question back a step is to set an impossibly high standard for any theory—how many social science theories would still be standing if Friedman's test of a theory's utility were to be used? Consider, for example, Durkheim's classic theory of suicide. Durkheim's theory explains the low suicide rate in Spain by showing that suicide is positively related to individualism; Protestantism is more individualistic than Catholicism; and there are few Protestants in Spain.¹²⁶ Using Friedman's standard, we would have to say that Durkheim has not explained suicide rates in Spain but merely pushed the question back a step. Unanswered are, why is Spain largely Catholic? and why are Catholics less individualistic than Protestants? These are, of course, important and interesting questions, but as George Homans points out, "the genetic chains that would account for them become terribly long and complex, and, unless cut off at some arbitrary point, lead back to the very beginnings of

written history in the West.”¹²⁷ Though Durkheim takes these historical questions as givens, we would not say that Durkheim’s explanation is therefore useless or question-begging. Similarly, that Cultural Theory takes certain things largely as givens—why Milton Friedman prefers a competitive individualist way of life and Ralph Nader prefers an egalitarian way of life, for example—does not mean that it does not provide a valuable answer to the question of preference formation.

It is especially unfair to say, as Friedman does, that Cultural Theory gets us no closer to accounting for political preferences than do rational choice theories that simply assume preferences. To equate a partial answer with no answer is to accept the logic that says, in the absence of a perfectly hygienic environment we might as well perform surgeries in the gutter. Let us agree that Cultural Theory falls somewhere between the last word on all human preferences that will bring social science to a glorious close and a useless theory that is no better at accounting for preferences than theories that make no effort to do so. With that out of the way, perhaps it is possible to discuss Cultural Theory’s relative strengths and weaknesses: what can it account for? what can it not (yet) account for? and, compared to what?

Compared to most theories of culture, Cultural Theory explains far more and far better because it does not invoke culture in such a way as to close off inquiry. Among Mary Douglas’s great contributions is to challenge those who would treat culture as its own explanation. Douglas insists that it is of no help to explain, for instance, Dutch cleanliness in terms of Dutch culture for the answer only restates the question, “why are the Dutch so clean?”¹²⁸ Douglas insists that a cultural theory must explain people’s allegiance to a set of ideas or practices, and this is precisely what the grid-group typology attempts to do.

Building a cultural theory out of dimensions rather than just using paste-on labels enables Cultural Theory to explain and not just invoke culture. In our analysis of Edward Banfield’s study of a southern Italian village, for instance, categorizing the residents of that village as fatalists is a starting point, not the end point. The grid-group social dimensions help explain why Banfield’s peasants adhere to such attitudes as fatalistic resignation and distrust of others, attitudes which might seem irrational to those who find themselves in different social contexts.¹²⁹ Cultural types plucked out of thin air may capture a good deal of variety, but they provide no explanation as to what social pressures sustain these cultural types. The types are because they are.¹³⁰

Compare, too, Cultural Theory with “schema theory.” Schemas, like cultural biases, are tacit theories people hold about the world that help them figure out what they prefer in the face of an otherwise bewildering blizzard of information. But while everyone agrees that schemas are important, few seem able to identify the content of schemas. Indeed, schemas have been multiplied ad infinitum until there seems almost to be a different schema for every individual, situation, and act. By infusing biases with content, and limiting the number of those biases, Cultural Theory provides what has been missing from schema theory.¹³¹

Cultural Theory helps explain what Thomas Sowell describes as “one of the most curious things about political opinions,” namely, “how often the same people line up on opposite sides of different issues.”¹³² Political life is patterned in this way, Cultural Theory argues, because in choosing their preferences people are defending one of a rather small number of ways of life. Cultural Theory may not be able to explain why one brother prefers egalitarianism and the other prefers individualism, but once we know about the preference for egalitarianism, Cultural Theory enables us to predict a large number of other preferences. Predicting a lot from a little is my conception of a powerful theory—not the perfect or ultimate or final theory, but a powerful one.

Why do people move from one culture to another, from one set of preferences to another? Our answer to this question, Friedman maintains, makes no sense: “It is nonsensical,” he says, “to speak of ‘evidence building up against’ values.”¹³³ This may be, but the passage in question does not speak of evidence building up against values. Instead it speaks of evidence building up against ways of life (actually the sentence Friedman quotes from reads, “as evidence builds up against theories, or as ways of life do not pay off for adherents, doubts build up, followed by defections”).¹³⁴ A way of life includes values but is not limited to values. The term “way of life,” to go back once more to our original definition, includes social relations (“patterns of interpersonal relations”) and cultural biases (“shared values *and beliefs*”).¹³⁵ Ways of life include not just values (e.g., eliminating distinctions between people is desirable) but beliefs about the empirical world (e.g., human nature is self-seeking or unpredictable, the natural world is fragile or resilient) that can be shaken by events in the real world.

For example, were scientific evidence to build up in favor of the proposition that global warming is an irreversible, man-made phenomenon and against the proposition that global warming largely

reflects the cyclical character of the earth's normal weather patterns, it would bolster the egalitarian view that nature is fragile and should be treated with care. Faced with compelling scientific evidence, individualists might question, moderate, even abandon their view that government need not worry much about protecting the environment. Individualists might conclude that, at least in this case, the market needs to be regulated, that restrictions need to be placed on individual freedom in the name of the whole. Commitment to the individualist way of life will have been shaken; perhaps global warming will remain an exception that is pigeonholed or ignored, or perhaps it will start an individual down the path to the egalitarian way of life. Political passions are so high on this issue not just because it involves "the fate of the earth" but because it is closely bound up with the debate between rival ways of life.

Cultural Theory insists that it is because people in defending their way of life make all sorts of empirical claims and promises to others that the real world can intrude and shake people's confidence in a way of life. Free-market capitalism, for instance, is valued by individualists for its ability to generate economic growth, and create wealth and material well-being. Were capitalist systems to cease to deliver on their promises, many people would begin casting around for alternative ways to organize their lives, as indeed occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Similarly, communist systems promised that they would be able both to create wealth and to share that wealth more equally so that everyone would be better off. When such systems instead produced economic stagnation and gross inequalities, they became plagued by self-doubt and defections, and ultimately collapsed.

A preference for one way of life over another includes a judgment not only of the intrinsic desirability of values but also of the attainability of those values. Whether one strives to achieve Marx's communist utopia, for instance, depends not only on how one feels about the desirability of a world in which one gives according to one's ability and takes according to one's needs, but also on one's judgment of how possible such a world is, which in turn is based on one's beliefs about human nature, the efficacy of revolutionary change, and so on. Conceptually it is possible to distinguish between empirical beliefs and normative values, but in the real world of decisions and preferences, these two components are inextricably connected.¹³⁶

Friedman's resistance to our formulation is particularly puzzling because elsewhere he has persuasively argued that if libertarians are to defend free-market capitalism they must do so not simply by asserting

"its intrinsic justice" (e.g., man has a natural right to property) but by developing "a consequentialist critique" of the welfare state that demonstrates the beneficial consequences of a free market.¹³⁷ In other words, defense of any mode of organizing entails not just assertions of normative principles or values (equality is good, private property is just) but also empirical demonstrations of the superior consequences of that mode of organizing. If Friedman is correct here, as I believe he is, then Cultural Theory must also be right for, at least in this respect, we are saying the same thing.

It is often difficult to recognize *Cultural Theory's* explanation of preference change in Friedman's caricature. Friedman summarizes our view thus: "When our preferences do change, it is because we bump into something we did not expect to encounter, awakening us from our dogmatic slumber just long enough to allow us, with no help from others, to conduct experiments upon our environment until we find a more 'fitting' way of life."¹³⁸ From where does Friedman get the impression that we posit individuals in a "dogmatic slumber"? In a passage he quotes just a few paragraphs earlier, we say, "The existence of competing ways of organizing gives individuals knowledge of other possibilities, and the opportunity to observe how the people who live according to these other ways are doing." This doesn't sound to me like a theory that posits individuals in deep sleep. Nor can I understand why Friedman insists that our position is that this reasoning must be accomplished "with no help from others." Such a position is inconsistent with the entire thrust of Cultural Theory, which is to embed people in their relationships with other people.

What *Cultural Theory* does do is put a theory of surprise at the center of our explanation of change. Surprise, we argue, occurs when one acts in a way the world isn't at that place and time (enter historical contingency). Expecting one outcome one gets another. The cumulative mismatch between expectation and result leads individuals to cast around for more satisfactory ways of living in the world. Moreover, *Cultural Theory* does not limit itself to talking generally about the importance of surprise. It lays out a typology of surprises, which identifies the specific types of surprises that will be generated by specific types of interactions between actual and stipulated worlds. For instance, an individualist who stipulates a world in which nature is benign when in fact the actual world is capricious will find that his (and others') carefully laid plans continually go unrewarded. Like the initially ebullient young boy in the film *Salaam Bombay*, he may persevere at first but in the absence of any evidence of some kind of rela-

tionship between initiative and advancement he will likely succumb to the fatalistic bias, which is the most rational adaptation to a capricious world.¹³⁹

Cultural Theory tries to combine an active, negotiating (not solitary or asocial, as Friedman charges) individual with an appreciation for the sociocultural context that shapes people's perceptions.¹⁴⁰ Friedman sees in this position only incoherence, the worst of both "the extreme [methodological] holism of the nineteenth century and the extreme [methodological] individualism of the eighteenth."¹⁴¹ I prefer to see Cultural Theory as an innovative effort to synthesize opposites in order to build a theory that preserves a place for the intendedly rational individual while also accounting for the powerful sociocultural forces exerted on us all. In *Cultural Theory*, we formulated our position this way: "Institutional arrangements do, as methodological collectivists contend, constrain behavior, but it is also true, as methodological individualists insist, that institutional arrangements are held together and modified by individual action. Individualists do find themselves in institutional settings not of their making, as Marx says, but it is individuals who create, sustain, and transform that setting. Put another way, the individual (unlike the behaviorist's rats) shapes the maze while running it."¹⁴²

Is Cultural Theory Amoral?

What is it about Cultural Theory that calls forth such a passionate response from Friedman? It is not, I suspect, just that Friedman prefers genetic explanation over functional explanation, or cultural history over cultural theory, or that he thinks our categories are empirically inadequate. There is something more, a feeling that Cultural Theory knows no morality. As Friedman states it, Cultural Theory contributes to "a determinism of ends," which obscures "that it is we, not our social contexts or our inaccessible selves, who decide what to value."¹⁴³ In other words, Cultural Theory absolves individuals of responsibility for their actions. Just as "economistic and libertarian theory" refuses to discuss the merits of individual preferences—"if it feels good, do it"—so Cultural Theory allows individuals to dodge individual responsibility for preferences by invoking culture—"my culture made me do it."

"There is no place," Friedman argues, in either Cultural Theory or libertarian liberalism, "for the communication and criticism of values,

i.e., of what one *should* prefer.”¹⁴⁴ This charge is misguided, for this is exactly the area that Cultural Theory opens up by identifying the unintended consequences of the ways of life that people choose. Tolstoy was wrong when he said that “science is meaningless because it gives no answer to . . . the only question important to us: What shall we do and how shall we live?”¹⁴⁵ For Cultural Theory does exactly this: it helps people to make better-informed choices about how they wish to live with each other by specifying the unanticipated consequences of those choices.

At the center of Cultural Theory is the notion that values have consequences. It is these consequences that not only explain how a way of life coheres but that allow for criticism of that way of life. Focusing on the consequences of values takes the normative dialogue beyond the impasse, “I like vanilla, you like chocolate.” To those who say they value hierarchy, Cultural Theory can point out the ways in which such systems, when things go wrong, blame deviants or quash investigations. To those who value individualism, Cultural Theory can point to the ways in which such systems teach individuals to blame themselves for failures that were none of their making. To those who value egalitarianism, Cultural Theory can show the ways in which such a way of life promotes exaggerated, almost paranoid fears about a monstrous establishment.¹⁴⁶ Knowledge of the unintended and often unsavory consequences of their preferred way of life may lead people to reconsider their preferences. Cultural Theory thus offers what Dankwart Rustow terms “social self-knowledge.”¹⁴⁷

Still Friedman’s worry lingers. If society chooses “behind our backs,” how can we be held responsible for those actions? Where does this sociocultural determinism leave what Friedman describes as “the question of morality—what should one do with one’s freedom?”¹⁴⁸ Does Cultural Theory lead down the path of postmodernism, which, as Thomas Haskell points out, “typically presupposes a self too vaporous to resist anything”? “From the postmodernist standpoint,” continues Haskell, “the self is not a discrete agent which merely takes cognizance of circumstances, and selects a course of action *in light of* them; instead its ‘situatedness’ is so thoroughgoing that, like the electrified gas inside a neon tube, it can only conform to the shape of its circumstantial container and respond on cue as environing forces surge irresistibly through it.”¹⁴⁹ So Stanley Fish, for instance, can say that “being situated . . . means that one cannot achieve a distance on one’s beliefs. . . . Freedom, in whatever shape it appears, is another name for constraint.”¹⁵⁰

If this is where sophisticated social theory lands us—unable to distinguish freedom from its opposite—Friedman's passionate rejection of such theories is more than justified. To avoid Friedman's censure, Cultural Theory must demonstrate how it is different from Fish's brand of postmodernism, which creates an Orwellian world in which freedom means coercion and knowledge is politicized. (Because all knowledge is situated and there is no such thing as objectivity, ideological preferences are the only basis for choosing between competing accounts.) First, though, the kernel of truth in Fish's pronouncement must be sifted out.

Individual freedom, the grid-group model holds, may be constrained either through requiring that a person be bound by group decisions or by demanding that individuals follow the rules accompanying their station in life. The further an individual moves toward the lower left-hand corner of the grid-group diagram (toward low group, low grid), the greater the individual's freedom to negotiate one's relationships with others. "A more open, competitive environment," writes Mary Douglas, "gives individuals more options, to deal or not to deal, to choose their own partners." The further one moves to the upper right-hand corner of the diagram, the more individuals are restricted in whom they can interact with. In this hierarchical setting, "an explicit set of institutionalized classifications keeps [individuals] apart and regulates their interactions, restricting their options."¹⁵¹ Freedom, in Cultural Theory, is definitely not the same as constraint.

What Fish seems to be saying is that even in a low-grid, competitive environment, cognition is shaped or constrained by one's social relations (or situation). A competitive individualist social environment means not an absence of social influence but a different type of social influence. Every set of social relations has its accompanying moral judgments (the individual is to blame; society is to blame; fate is to blame; the deviant is to blame) that justify those relations. To move toward a society where the freedom to transact is greater is not to escape social life nor the social constructions by which people justify their lives together. On this and this point only Fish and Cultural Theory are in agreement.

Cultural Theory departs radically from Fish's postmodern vision in adamantly rejecting the notion of human beings as robots, mindlessly enacting their social roles, or dupes, unable to see for the hegemonic culture that encloses them. Cultures are not passively received and internalized but instead are continually being negotiated by individuals. Cultural Theory avoids turning individuals into passive pawns of

their sociocultural environment in two ways. First, it insists on the importance of adult, rather than only childhood, experience in shaping individual orientations. Experience with institutions and ideas counts.¹⁵² People who lived through the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror, for instance, are unlikely to view radical egalitarianism quite the same way as before.

Second, and more important, Cultural Theory focuses on competing norms and values within a society. In the absence of conflict between rival cultures, no social force exists to raise fundamental beliefs to the surface where they can be examined and probed. If there is only one tradition available to us and there is no way of thinking outside of some tradition—as there most assuredly is not—then we are indeed, as Fish grimly suggests, hopelessly trapped within our sociocultural situation. If, however, one allows for competing cultural biases within any society, there is no need to acquiesce in Fish's fatalistic pathos. Culture no longer seems an inescapable prison. If people inhabit an environment characterized by rival cultural biases, then they have ample opportunity to compare their bias with other biases. If alternative ways of looking at the world are constantly clashing, then there is significant scope for learning about, testing, and even abandoning cultural attachments. In a world of clashing biases, culture is a prism, not a prison.¹⁵³

Cultural Theory also totally rejects Fish's view that there is no emancipatory potential in striving to become more self-aware.¹⁵⁴ Recognizing that each way of life, as Mary Douglas writes, has its "own torments and temptations"¹⁵⁵ is to set oneself upon the road to greater understanding and self-consciousness about the choices one makes. To say that the task of social science is to recognize the pitfalls of each way of life, to describe the causes and consequences of each way as fairly and as fully as possible, is not to say that we should be neutral between them. Indeed Cultural Theory gives lots of reasons for not being neutral.¹⁵⁶

Cultural Theory aspires to the objectivity that comes from developing what Thomas Nagel describes as "a view of the world in which the self is not at the center but is included as merely one among many objects."¹⁵⁷ Like all cultural anthropology, Cultural Theory aims to elucidate the rationality that governs other ways of being in the world as a way of gaining perspective on one's own choices and commitments.¹⁵⁸ How much more civilized our politics would be if defenders of affirmative action would sympathetically enter into the worldview of their opponents rather than dismiss opposition as covert racism.

How much more cogent our political discourse would be if opponents of multiculturalism would engage the other side's arguments rather than dismiss them as "politically correct." How much more edifying would be the debate over abortion if the two sides could grasp the cultural biases of their opponents. "To mount a telling attack on a position," Thomas Haskell points out, "one must first inhabit it."¹⁵⁹ By elucidating the ways of life that undergird rival policy preferences, Cultural Theory enables people to sympathetically inhabit the positions of others, and by so doing allows them to mount more powerful arguments in behalf of their way of life.

The way out of social determinism is not to deny the impact of social influences on perception. To assert that "it is we, not our social contexts or our inaccessible selves, who decide what to value" is a nonstarter because we *in our social contexts* decide what to value. People outside of social contexts are unimaginable. But to concede that preferences are rooted in sociocultural relations is not necessarily to succumb to a fashionable fatalism about the impossibility of individual choice or objectivity. It is never defensible to say "my culture made me do it" unless individuals are directly coerced. Individuals are not only products but creators of their way of life. Both cultural change and stability are impossible without people deciding what it is they would like to reinforce and to change, and justifying these decisions to themselves and to others.

More to the point, knowledge of one's own cultural biases can be liberating. Latent functions may be made manifest. Hidden causal connections can be exposed and behavior changed. Unexamined premises can be brought to the surface and examined. Far from shielding preferences from criticism, as Friedman charges, Cultural Theory exposes each way of life to criticism. And far from shying away from normative questions, Cultural Theory promises to improve the quality of the vitally important debate over which way(s) of life we should prefer.

But Cultural Theory assuredly does not tell a person what to prefer. The grid-group theory attempts to explain and describe patterns of preferences rather than to prescribe them. Its primary aim is to understand why people behave as they do and to specify the consequences of those behaviors, not to tell people how they should behave. Were it otherwise, only people who agreed with the theory's cultural preferences could use it. Cultural Theory would disqualify itself both as a social science theory and as a genuinely critical theory, critical, that is, of all ways of life. To understand social forces beyond or behind individual consciousness is not to promote or condone individual irre-

sponsibility, but to avoid understanding those sociocultural determinants of our thinking is to make individual moral responsibility more difficult not less.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences: Cultural Theory vs. Cultural History," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 325-51; Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990). I follow Friedman's usage in capitalizing Cultural Theory in order to distinguish the particular theory advanced in *Cultural Theory* from the general enterprise of theorizing about culture.
2. Friedman, 339, 340. Elsewhere, Friedman writes that "individualism is, in all probability, historically as well as logically inseparable from egalitarianism" ("The New Consensus: I. The Fukuyama Thesis," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 3, nos. 3-4 [Summer-Fall 1989]: 400). And in another place, he describes "individualism as a form of egalitarianism." "Secreted within individualism . . . is not only a declaration that there is some higher morality than freedom of action; there is also a specific content of that morality: egalitarianism" ("The New Consensus: II. The Democratic Welfare State," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 4, no. 4 [Fall 1990]: 640).
3. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 339-40, *emph. original*. See also Friedman, "The Fukuyama Thesis," 400.
4. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 339. See also Friedman, "The Fukuyama Thesis," 402.
5. Friedman, "The Democratic Welfare State," 635.
6. Friedman, "The Fukuyama Thesis," 400. Friedman suggests that the Declaration of Independence and socialism express "the creed of equal rights that is common to both" (402). A similar position can be found in Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1968).
7. Friedman, "The Fukuyama Thesis," 400.
8. *Ibid.*, 388.
9. *Ibid.*, 374. Friedman is quoting from Francis Fukuyama (*The National Interest* no. 18, [Winter 1989/90]: 4-5), who is summarizing the Hegel-Kojève view of history.
10. A seminal article on the limitations of the modernity-tradition dichotomy is Lloyd Rudolph, "The Modernity of Tradition: The Democratic Incarnation of Caste in India," *American Political Science Review* 59 (December 1965): 975-89. See also Reinhard Bendix, "Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 9 (April 1967): 292-346.

11. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory*, 166.
12. I elaborate this point in Richard J. Ellis, "Rival Visions of Equality in American Political Culture," *Review of Politics* 54 (Spring 1992): 253-80. See also Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: Quill, 1987), esp. ch. 6; as well as Douglas Rae, *Equalities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).
13. James S. Fishkin, *Justice, Equal Opportunity, and the Family* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 159. See also Charles Lockhart, "Culturally Constructed Conceptions of Distributive Justice: The Case of Affirmative Action," typescript, July 1992.
14. Friedman, "The Fukuyama Thesis," 388.
15. Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 14, emphasis in original. See also Leon Fink, "The New Labor History and the Powers of Historical Pessimism: Consensus, Hegemony, and the Case of the Knights of Labor," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 123-24.
16. Friedman, "The Fukuyama Thesis," 387, emphasis added.
17. *Ibid.*, 378. Friedman's argument is that if pure socialism is impossible, as Hayek and Mises demonstrate, then Communist countries in order to be viable must employ market mechanisms and therefore are only different in degree and not in kind from capitalistic countries (383). "Either the economic critique [of Hayek and Mises] is wrong," Friedman reasons, "or real existing socialism is not *really* socialist" (384). From this Friedman concludes that "the movement toward interventionist market economies cannot be considered a qualitative break with the past" (385). Since "the Western economies are themselves interventionist, although not nearly to the same degree or in the same way, then it makes no more sense to insist on the recent victory of 'capitalism' than on the recent defeat of 'socialism'" (385). I cannot follow why, if a system goes from 98 parts A and 2 parts B to 98 parts B and 2 parts A, that one cannot represent this as a decisive victory for B and a decisive defeat for A.
18. Jeffrey Friedman, "Methodological vs. Normative Individualism," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 4, nos. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1990): 5. See also Friedman, "The Democratic Welfare State," 639.
19. Jeffrey Friedman, "Liberalism and Post-Structuralism," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 5.
20. Friedman, "The Fukuyama Thesis," 402.
21. Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review* 44 (December 1970): 1040.
22. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 331.
23. *Ibid.*, 350n4.
24. See John M. Ellis, "The Western Tradition of Political Correctness," *Academic Questions* 5 (Spring 1992): 24-31.

25. "Minority Update," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 3, 1991; Jacob Weisberg, "Thin Skins," *New Republic*, February 18, 1991, 23.
26. Nat Hentoff, "'Speech Codes' and Free Speech," in Patricia Aufderheide, ed., *Beyond PC: Toward A Politics of Understanding* (St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 1992), 50–58; Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 124–56.
27. Donald Morrison, "The Scholastic Test Remains Racist, Sexist, and Classist," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 13, 1991, B3.
28. Joe Segall, "When Academic Quality Is Beside the Point," *Wall Street Journal*, October 29, 1990.
29. Glynn Custred, "Governor Vetoes Quotas in Higher Education—But the Same Bills Are Due Back This Year," *The California Scholar*, Spring 1991, 4–5; Vincent Sarich, "The Institutionalization of Racism at the University of California at Berkeley," *Academic Questions* 4 (Winter 1990–91): 72–81.
30. John Taylor, "Are You Politically Correct?" *New York*, January 21, 1991, 35.
31. Danielle Sallenave, quoted in Patricia Bett, "To French Scholars, 'le Politiquement Correct' is a Symptom of America's Social Breakdown," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 17, 1992, A37.
32. If hierarchy is dead, how does one account for the powerful appeal of the pro-life movement? How about Jewish, Catholic and Protestant fundamentalists? What are the social sources of the powerful antigay backlash? In a recent essay, Camille Paglia provocatively suggests that Princess Diana's "staggering worldwide popularity demonstrates the enduring power and significance of hierarchy, a power that fashionable academic paradigms—influenced by feminism, Marxism, Foucault, and the Frankfurt School—cannot understand" ("An Icon Named Diana," *The Globe and Mail*, July 25, 1992, D5).
33. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 337, 338; see also 344.
34. For two excellent examples of cultural history that reveal the fruits of the marriage of social and intellectual history, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).
35. Robert Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 329. Darnton documents the move among contemporary historians away "from the holistic to the institutional view of intellectual life" (340).
36. The literature is vast, but seminal methodological essays are Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969): 3–53; and J.G.A. Pocock, "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought," in

- Pocock, ed., *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 3-41. See also *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James H. Tully (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).
37. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 53.
 38. On Weber, see Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 161-73.
 39. On the "atomized world" and the accompanying distrust and fatalism of prisoners, see Donald Clemer, *The Prison Community* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), esp. 297-98.
 40. In Genovese's words, "the confrontation of master and slave, white and black, on a plantation presided over by a resident planter for whom the plantation was a home and the entire population part of his extended family generated [a patriarchal and paternalistic] ethos" (*The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* [New York: Random House, 1969; Vintage ed., 1971], 96). Genovese's position is critically assessed in Richard J. Ellis, "Legitimizing Slavery in the Old South: The Effect of Political Institutions on Ideology," *Studies in American Political Development* 5 (Fall 1991): 340-51.
 41. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 340.
 42. *Ibid.*, 337.
 43. The six items for the individualism scale were: In a fair system people with more ability should earn significantly more; Those who are poor usually have only themselves to blame; Egalitarian systems will never work because they destroy people's incentives to better themselves; Opportunities abound for those willing to seize them; Economic growth is the key to our quality of life; Society would be better off if there was less government regulation of business.
 44. Only the right-to-life abortion activists showed levels of support for individualist values that were comparable to (although still slightly below) the level of support exhibited by car salesmen. This is particularly remarkable because the pro-life activists were substantially more conservative and more Republican than the car salesmen. Seventy percent of pro-life activists considered themselves very conservative and another 20 percent counted themselves as somewhat conservative. In contrast, only about 12 percent of the car salesmen called themselves very conservative and another 16 percent called themselves somewhat conservative. Moreover, close to 90 percent of the right-to-life sample identified themselves as Republicans (70 percent said they were strong Republicans), and none called themselves Democrats. Among car salesmen, in contrast, one-quarter labeled themselves as Democrats, 40 percent identified themselves as Republicans and 35 percent declined to choose.
 45. Casey Hayden's description of her relationship to the civil rights movement provides a good illustration of what Douglas has in mind by "strong group." "The movement," Hayden writes, "today is commonly

known as the civil rights movement, but it was considerably more than that. To me, it was everything: home and family, food and work, love and reason to live. When I was no longer there, and then when it was no longer there at all, it was hard to go on" (Preface to Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* [New York: Morrow, 1987], 7).

46. Gary L. Downey, "Ideology and the Clamshell Identity: Organizational Dilemmas in the Anti-Nuclear Power Movement," *Social Problems* 33 (June 1986): 357-73; Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
47. Andrea Baker, "The Problem of Authority in Radical Movement Groups: A Case Study of Lesbian-Feminist Organization," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 18 (1982): 323-41; Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1972-73): 151-64; Carol Kirchner, "A Cultural Analysis of Social Movement Organizations," typescript, 1986.
48. Ann Swidler, *Organization without Authority: Dilemmas of Social Control in Free Schools* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).
49. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 337.
50. Mary Douglas, "Introduction to Grid/Group Analysis," in Mary Douglas, ed., *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 7.
51. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 337. Of course, anti-slavery sentiment explains why people joined abolitionist organizations before the Civil War. And of course an antipathy to established institutions explains why abolitionists created separate "countercultural" groups and organizations. But the dynamics of the egalitarian mode of social organization help explain puzzling features of the subsequent evolution of the ideology of abolitionism. For instance, although individuals joined out of a desire to eliminate slavery, the most radical abolitionist groups pushed a policy of disunion that would have left slavery untouched but would have left the North free of the taint of sin. Placing internal purity ahead of eradicating slavery stemmed from their decision to organize their lives in an egalitarian way.

In the absence of hierarchical authority or sanctions, moreover, abolitionists found it difficult to keep their groups together. As Cultural Theory predicts, the result was an increasing tendency among abolitionists to demonize the outside world as utterly vile. Such a rigid dichotomization between an evil outside and a good inside served to remind members that though life on the inside may have its faults, life outside was much worse. The abolitionists' Manichean cosmology, remarked upon by many historians, was not a product of a peculiarly paranoid bunch of personalities but of a decision to organize their lives in an egalitarian fashion. This argument is elaborated in Richard Ellis and

- Aaron Wildavsky, "A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (January 1990): 89–116. See also Lawrence J. Friedman, *Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
52. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 1.
53. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 344.
54. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 1, emphasis in original.
55. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 350n10. The quotation from *Cultural Theory* is on page 1. Friedman's misreading of our definition of "way of life" is evident throughout, as, for instance, when he says "cultural ideals can be and usually are unrelated to social ways of life" (344), or when he faults "the book's striking lack of concrete evidence for the relationship between ways of life and cultural biases" (334), or attributes to us the position that "ways of life alone cause cultural biases" (343), or contends that "operationally, the five ways of life play very little role in grounding the authors' concrete descriptions of contemporary culture" (334).
56. *Ibid.*, 337, 338, emphasis added.
57. *Ibid.*, 337.
58. For a superb application of Cultural Theory demonstrating this proposition, see Gerald Mars, *Cheats at Work: An Anthropology of Workplace Crime* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982).
59. Evidence of this connection emerges from the Unilever project currently being conducted by Michael Thompson.
60. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 266.
61. Relevant here are the findings of Samuel Stouffer et al., which showed that it was easier for people from more authoritarian families to adapt to the army's hierarchical social structure than it was for people from more egalitarian or individualistic backgrounds (*The American Soldier* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949]).
62. Jennifer L. Hochschild argues that people reconcile egalitarian norms and roles at home and in the polity with more individualistic norms and roles in the economy by compartmentalizing the different spheres of life (*What's Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981]).
63. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 266.
64. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 332.
65. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 273.
66. After all, at around the time we were beginning *Cultural Theory*, Wildavsky and I were completing a book (*Dilemmas of Presidential Leadership: From Washington through Lincoln* [New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1989]), applying the categories of Cultural Theory to early American presidents, and immediately after finishing *Cultural Theory*, I

began work on *American Political Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), which uses Cultural Theory to interpret the entire sweep of American history from the Puritans to the New Left. See also Ellis and Wildavsky, "A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists."

67. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 341, emphasis added.
68. Ibid., 341. Friedman qualifies this, adding "unless the authors were to have developed a theory that interpreted history itself as being governed by socially generated laws of development" (341-42). This suggests that had we argued that all of human history passes through distinct stages, say from fatalism to hierarchy to individualism before finally arriving at egalitarianism, our approach would have somehow been more historical. My view is different. By jettisoning the untenable developmental laws of nineteenth-century social theory that gave history a predetermined course and destination, Cultural Theory opens up a place for history by allowing for contingency. Contrary to Comte, Spencer, Marx, Hegel, and company, it is not preordained that one way of life will win out over all the rest, or that every society will pass through the same stages. In criticizing inevitable, developmental laws we are not rejecting history but salvaging it.
69. On Parsons's responsibility for having "severed critical links between historical research and theoretical synthesis," see David Zaret, "From Weber to Parsons and Schutz: The Eclipse of History in Modern Social Theory," *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (March 1980): 1180-1201, quote on 1198. On the ahistoricism of Blalock's vision of empirical sociology, see Peter Knapp, "Can Social Theory Escape from History? Views of History in Social Science," *History and Theory* 23 (1984): 40-42.
70. Richard Jensen, "History and the Political Scientist," in Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Politics and the Social Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 1-28. I have discussed the negative consequences of this divorce of history and political science in the context of presidential studies in Richard J. Ellis, "What Can Nineteenth-Century Presidents Teach Us about the Twentieth-Century Presidency?" Paper prepared for delivery at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 1990.
71. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Anthropology and History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 1.
72. Ibid., 2, 4.
73. See Dennis Kavanagh, "Why Political Science Needs History," *Political Studies* 39 (September 1991), 479-95, and the sources cited therein.
74. The estimate is taken from Knapp, 51.
75. I endorse Maurice Mandelbaum's view that "no social scientist will ever be able either to discover or to confirm those generalizations in which he is interested, without making an appeal to the descriptive analyses of historians," and that "the range of the relevant historical materials will

increase, rather than contract, as the range of the generalizations spreads" ("Historical Explanation: The Problem of 'Covering Laws,'" *History and Theory* 1 [1961]: 241, 242). I agree, too, with Peter Knapp that "history is an irreducible, inescapable element of social theory. . . . When [social scientists] decide that concern with theory absolves them from concern with history, their product will not only be irrelevant historically, it will not even be adequate as theory. . . . [By the same token,] historians . . . must draw on social theory if they are . . . to give adequate particular accounts" (Knapp, 34–35).

76. Ellis and Wildavsky, *Dilemmas of Presidential Leadership*. See also Ellis, "What Can Nineteenth-Century Presidents Teach Us?"
77. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 272.
78. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 342.
79. At the same time, not all the defining features of a category must be present in each case. Cultural Theory employs what Mary Douglas, following Rodney Needham, calls "a polythetic method." Polythetic classification, Douglas explains, "identifies classes by a combination of characteristics, not requiring any one of the defining features to be present in all members of a class. Each included member only needs to show a majority of the features in the class" ("Cultural Bias," in id., *In the Active Voice* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982], esp. 200–201.
80. Knapp, 35, 38.
81. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 257.
82. A preliminary attempt in this direction can be found in Ellis and Wildavsky, esp. 6–12.
83. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 273.
84. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 341.
85. See Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 114, and part II, *passim*.
86. Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 77. See also Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 134; and Charles Ragin and David Zaret, "Theory and Method in Comparative Research: Two Strategies," *Social Forces* 61 (March 1983): 732.
87. Guenther Roth, "Introduction," Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), xxxv; Ragin and Zaret, 732. For reasons explained in *Cultural Theory*, we believe our categories are superior to Weber's. See Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, esp. 162–63.
88. *Cultural Theory* plays down the differences in Weber and Durkheim's methodological writings in order to emphasize the parallels in their practice, in particular Weber's reliance on a functional form of explanation when he tried to understand how the beliefs and practices of "status groups" functioned to sustain those groups' material and ideal interests (see ch. 9, esp. 170–71).
89. Ragin and Zaret, "Theory and Method." See also Reinhard Bendix, "Two

- Sociological Traditions," in Bendix and Guenther Roth, eds., *Scholarship and Partisanship: Essays on Max Weber* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
90. Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Haracourt, Brace & World, 1961), 25.
 91. Ragin and Zaret, 747. This does not mean that Durkheim renounced the need for history. Far from it. As Robert N. Bellah shows, Durkheim, "from his earliest to his latest work, urges the closest *rapprochement* between sociology and history" ("Durkheim and History," in Robert A. Nisbet, ed., in *Emile Durkheim* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965], 153).
 92. Ragin and Zaret, 741.
 93. I take this distinction between history as past behavior and history as development from Samuel H. Beer, "Political Science and History," in Melvin Richter, ed., *Essays in Theory and History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 41-73.
 94. Ragin and Zaret, "Theory and Method."
 95. Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Barrington Moore, *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 1967); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974).
 96. Nagel, 15-16. Nagel distinguishes between four forms of explanation: deductive, probabilistic, functional or teleological, and genetic.
 97. These examples and much of the language are taken from Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 16, 20.
 98. Camille Paglia, "The Joy of Presbyterian Sex," *The New Republic*, December 2, 1991, 27. Paglia is describing the view of human nature she sees as embodied in the 1990 report, "Keeping Body and Soul Together," issued by the Special Committee on Human Sexuality of the Presbyterian Church.
 99. Helen Caldicott, an environmental activist, quoted in Theodore Roszak, "Green Guilt and Ecological Overload," *New York Times*, June 9, 1992.
 100. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 334-35.
 101. *Ibid.*, 339.
 102. *Ibid.*, 345. Friedman also says that "the five cultures (or at least the four social cultures) are, if nothing else, close matches to contemporary political self-understandings" (*ibid.*).
 103. *Ibid.*, 345, 349, 338.
 104. See Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics."
 105. Lucien W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).
 106. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 336.
 107. Pye, quoted in Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 228.

108. Although Part II of *Cultural Theory*, in the course of discussing the categories used by the "greats" of sociological theory, does briefly discuss a wide range of premodern or traditional societies. In addition, Part II includes a section (albeit brief) on the Kachins of Burma and the Mac-Enga people of New Guinea (122-23).
109. Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 15-16, 19.
110. E. Adamson Hoebel, "The Political Organization and Law-Ways of the Comanche Indians," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association* no. 54: 1940. Supp. to *American Anthropologist* 42, no. 3, part 2: 6, 11, 35, 54.
111. Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 188-89, 191. Also see Helen Codere, *Fighting with Property: A Study of Kwakiutl Potlatching and Warfare, 1792-1930* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).
112. Glenn Robinson, "Militancy and Millenarianism: A Cultural Theory Approach to the Jama'at al-Islamiyya in Egypt," typescript, 1987, 19, 17.
113. C. William Hill, Jr., "The Ancestral Political Cultures of the Cherokee, Lakota, and Navajo: An Application of Cultural Theory," typescript, July 1990, 17.
114. Categorizing both the Jama'at al-Islamiyya and Cherokee as egalitarian does not mean that they would occupy identical positions on the grid-group dimensions. The Jama'at al would be positioned further to the right on the group dimension than the Cherokee.
115. Brian Tierney, "Hierarchy, Consent, and the 'Western Tradition,'" *Political Theory* 15 (November 1987): 650.
116. Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 163. See also Alan Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).
117. Pye, 39.
118. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 339.
119. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 272-73. In a most extraordinary sentence, Friedman says, "It is strange that in a book which claims to provide a framework for redescribing all of human cultural history, the focus is so abstract" ("Accounting for Political Preferences," 335). Far from being strange, the abstractness follows necessarily from our goal of constructing types that can travel across time and space.
120. John C. McKinney, "The Polar Variables of Type Construction," *Social Forces* 35 (October 1956-May 1957): 303.
121. Edward A. Tiryakian, "Typologies," in David Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), vol. 16, 178.
122. This sentence is adapted from Knapp, 36.
123. Beer, "Political Science and History," 44.
124. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 349.
125. *Ibid.*, 346, emphasis added. Here Friedman follows David Laitin, who

- says that "Wildavsky does not answer his question about the source of preferences but *merely* pushes it back one step" ("Political Culture and Political Preferences," *American Political Science Review* 81 (March 1987): 590, emphasis added).
126. The example is taken from George Homans, *The Nature of Social Science* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 98-99.
 127. *Ibid.*, 99.
 128. See Douglas, "Cultural Bias," esp. 183-85; and Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), esp. 31. See also Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 218.
 129. See Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 261-62.
 130. For a recent example of this, see William H. Bergquist, *The Four Cultures of the Academy: Insights and Strategies for Improving Leadership in Collegiate Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).
 131. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 58.
 132. Sowell, 13.
 133. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 348.
 134. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 69.
 135. *Ibid.*, 1, emphasis added.
 136. See Martin Landau, *Political Theory and Political Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 198-202; and Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 22.
 137. Friedman, "The Democratic Welfare State," 636-37.
 138. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 348.
 139. Of course, actual and stipulated worlds are not totally separate realms. As *Cultural Theory* explains, "people act in the world on the basis of how they believe it to be, and in acting, they profoundly change that world" (81 n1). To model such endogenous change is a daunting but not impossible task. For a fearless attempt, see Michael Thompson and Paul Tayler, "The Surprise Game: An Exploration of Constrained Relativism," *Warwick Papers in Management*, no. 1, Institute for Management Research and Development (Coventry: University of Warwick, 1986).
 140. In this enterprise, we are hardly alone. The historian Gordon S. Wood, for instance, argues that to write satisfying intellectual and cultural history "we will need a kind of zoom lens that will enable us to move easily back and forth from the small, close-up world of unique events and individual volition where men try to use ideas for their own particular purposes to the larger aggregate and deterministic world of cultural conventions and collective mentalities where ideas control men. Only then will we be able to see how individuals . . . make small accretive piecemeal changes in the constantly developing cultural aggregates" ("Intellectual History and the Social Sciences," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* [Baltimore:

- Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979], 37). See also Douglas, "Cultural Bias," 188–90.
141. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 347.
142. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 22; see also 207–8. Cultural Theory is hardly alone in trying to break down the opposition between methodological collectivism and methodological individualism. See especially the work of philosopher Maurice Mandelbaum, which is usefully discussed in Christopher Lloyd, "Realism and Structurism in Historical Theory: A Discussion of the Thought of Maurice Mandelbaum," *History and Theory* 28 (1989): 296–325.
143. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 349. I am indebted to Aaron Wildavsky for encouraging me to pursue the significance of this sentence.
144. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 349. Friedman, unaccountably, has nothing to say about our section, "How Do Adherents of Rival Ways of Life Communicate?" which explicitly takes up the question of communication as well as criticism of values (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 267–69).
145. W. G. Runciman, *Social Science and Political Theory*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 156. Runciman quotes from Weber ("Science as a Vocation") who is quoting from Tolstoy.
146. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, 59–60.
147. Beer, "Political Science and History," 68.
148. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 329.
149. Thomas L. Haskell, "Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: Rhetoric vs. Practice in Peter Novick's *The Noble Dream*," *History and Theory* 29 (1990): 133n7, emphasis in original. Here, as in so many other respects, postmodernism reproduces old errors but covers them in a new, chic attire. For criticisms of the "oversocialized conception of man" typical of 1950s sociological theory, see Dennis Wrong, "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology," *American Sociological Review* 26 (April 1961): 183–93; George C. Homans, "Bringing Men Back In," *American Sociological Review* 29 (December 1964): 809–18; and Aaron V. Cicourel, *Cognitive Sociology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). See also Douglas, "Cultural Bias," esp. 188–90.
150. Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), 467, 459. Fish is quoted in Haskell, 133n7.
151. Douglas, "Cultural Bias," 192–93.
152. Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory*, 218.
153. *Ibid.*, 218–19. This paragraph is drawn from the concluding section of my *American Political Cultures*.
154. Haskell, 133n7.
155. Douglas, "Cultural Bias," 195.

156. Here as elsewhere my understanding of the relationship between objectivity and neutrality has been shaped by Haskell's fine essay, "Objectivity Is Not Neutrality." See also Martin Landau, "Objectivity, Neutrality, and Kuhn's Paradigm," in Landau, 43-77; and Aaron Wildavsky, "Has Modernity Killed Objectivity?" *Society* 29 (November/December 1991): 33-36.
157. Haskell, 129. Haskell is paraphrasing Thomas Nagel's argument in *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
158. See Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* and, of course, the work of Franz Boas.
159. Haskell, 135.

CULTURAL THEORY AS
INDIVIDUALISTIC IDEOLOGY:
REJOINDER TO ELLIS

How can one examine the sources of people's beliefs, tastes, and preferences without falling into the self-refuting determinism that has so often characterized the most systematic theory of preferences, Marxism? Cultural Theory's attempt to do so posits five anthropologically derived, competing "ways of life"—individualism, egalitarianism, hierarchism, fatalism, and withdrawal from social life—that are intended to apply to all forms of culture and, therefore, to provide a universal framework for explaining people's preferential biases. Richard Ellis's defense of Cultural Theory, however, does not adequately address the concerns expressed in my critique of it. Ellis fails to instance a single case of a premodern culture containing the five ways of life; he does not show that exclusivist premodern versions of "individualism" and "egalitarianism" are more than superficially comparable to the inclusive modern variants of these alleged universals; and he adds new evidence to support my claim that in modern societies, people's preferences are largely unlinked to the particular social relations identified by Cultural Theory. While Ellis overtly denies that Cultural Theory is deterministic, his search for links between preferences and social relations shows that this denial cannot be sustained.

Cultural Theory's reductionism stems from its neglect of historically contingent cultural traditions that thwart a priori attempts to predict culture. This ahistoricism transforms a myopic view of American politics as a battle of egalitarianism against individualism into a timeless truth, providing ideological self-affirmation

for "individualists" but diminishing the prospects for being able to explain or criticize individualism—or any other political preference.

In my critique¹ of the recently published manifesto of Cultural Theory (entitled *Cultural Theory*),² I contended that its authors—Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and the late Aaron Wildavsky—fail in their admirable attempt to break with liberal and rational-choice reluctance to examine the sources of people's preferences. The Cultural Theorists' error, I claimed, was to posit a universal theory of preferences, in this case based on Mary Douglas's anthropology of "grid and group," rather than allowing for the possibility that particular preferences are contingent products of historical circumstance. Indeed, their own theory unwittingly embodies the assumptions of a particular historical configuration: that of the modern West. Cultural Theory is so beholden to the very phenomena it sets out to investigate that it never achieves the critical distance needed to analyze them.

I shall conclude this rejoinder to Ellis's reply (Richard J. Ellis, "The Case for Cultural Theory: Reply to Friedman," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 7, no. 1 [Winter 1993]: 81–128; page references given parenthetically) by returning to the political ramifications of Cultural Theory's nearsightedness (see pp. 148 ff. below). Most of Ellis's reply, however, and therefore most of my rejoinder, is about methodology rather than politics—despite my acknowledgment that "*Cultural Theory* provides a wealth of important insights, especially concerning social science methodology."³

I endorsed in particular Cultural Theory's attempt to "strike a much-needed balance between naive, rationalistic versions of methodological individualism and the self-contradictory . . . extreme functionalism characteristic of some forms of Marxism."⁴ My complaint, contrary to Ellis's animadversions, was not against any attempt to examine the social influences on people's ideas. I certainly did not oppose, implicitly or explicitly, all social science, all social history, all sociology, all "attempts to relate how people live with how people think," or all "situating [of] texts in their . . . social context" (88). I repudiated none of the authority figures Ellis arrays against me—not Perry Anderson, not Reinhard Bendix, not Emile Durkheim, not E. E. Evans-Pritchard, not Karl Marx, not Barrington Moore, not J. G. A. Pocock, not Quentin Skinner, not Theda Skocpol, not Max Weber, not even the History and Politics section of the Western Political Science Association. I objected to the particular brand of social contextualization practiced by Cultural Theorists—not to social contex-

tualization in general. When I asserted the independence of modern cultural ideals from “variations in social ways of life,” I used the latter phrase in the peculiar way Cultural Theorists do (about which more below)—not in the broad sense of “ways of life” *tout court*.

Indeed, I *praised* Cultural Theory’s attempt to define a relationship between values and their social context that does not entail “an exogenous determinism so extreme that it would not allow the possibility of transcending the social influences on one’s preferences.” Were this attempt to succeed, I wrote, we could consider whether “the modern libertarian relativism of tastes and preferences seems reasonable” to Westerners because they are “participants in societies in which economic and political choice-making is the stuff of everyday life: a much more plausible sociology of bourgeois ideology than Marx’s exclusively interest-based explanation, and one that leaves room for answering the separate, historical question of how that ideology *originated*.”⁵ Such an investigation would, despite Ellis’s invocation of the sociological deities, be entirely consistent with the spirit of Weber and Durkheim—not to mention Simmel, Spencer, Tocqueville, and Comte—who were preoccupied, if not obsessed, with the *unique* aspects of modern culture.

Ellis is deaf to this praise because of his apparent conviction that any critic of Cultural Theory is bound to believe that “the social institutions in which we live have . . . little effect on how we think, and that how we think has . . . little effect on the institutions we create” (87). Yet far from faulting Cultural Theory for being *too* institutionalist, I criticized it for overlooking the most influential cultural institutions in the modern West: “such institutions as families, organized religions, formal education, art, literature, cinema, television, and so on.”⁶

When Ellis endorses the need to take account of “institutions,” he does not mean cultural institutions in that sense. Instead, he refers to the “particular types of *social relations*” that Cultural Theorists associate with “particular types of cultural bias” (89, emphasis added). My more expansive, and commonplace, understanding of institutions recognizes that they commonly shape us through the *traditions* they may transmit. This form of institutional influence is inadmissible for Cultural Theory, I wrote, because traditions, “even if initially founded in social relations . . . subsequently take on a life of their own,”⁷ such that they cannot be derived from a priori, universally applicable categories of the sort Cultural Theorists deploy.

Cultural Theory’s categories, preeminently the four social “ways of life” (plus the hermit’s asociality), are transhistorical deductions from

allegedly necessary features of all social relations. Traditions with lives of their own, by contrast, are historical particulars caused by a multitude of contingent factors. When Ellis writes of Cultural Theory's attention to competing "traditions" (114), he cannot mean traditions that develop at all independently of social relations—for the content of independently developing traditions could not be discerned from invariant correlations between four or five types of social relations and four or five corresponding "biases." An institutionalism that took account of historically contingent traditions would not presume to predict that the particular features of actual, temporally evolving cultures *must* fit into the "timeless" (88) categories of individualism, egalitarianism, hierarchism, and fatalism. Prediction is the goal of Cultural Theory; its weakness is that prediction precludes an institutionalism worthy of the name. The rest of my methodological remarks will elaborate this point and address Ellis's attempts to refute it.

The Need for "Theory"

Ellis justifies conflating cultural institutions with the narrowly social institutions compatible with Cultural Theory by means of another conflation: between the minimal sort of "theory" needed to impose order on the buzzing, blooming confusion of the empirical world, and the globalistic kind of theory that tries to predict what phenomena in all cultures must look like. Bringing order to the welter of empirical phenomena, Ellis suggests, requires an invariant (albeit vague) theory of culture. Allowing for the influence of cultural institutions like those I listed above would threaten this invariance because they are not reducible to one of Cultural Theory's four or five types of social relation. That is, they are historically contingent.

I agree with Ellis that "history without theory . . . is uninterpretable" (95)—when "theory" means *some sort* of introspectively plausible assumptions about human behavior. I specified that I objected to theory only "in the sense of an always-applicable model."⁸ That we must order history with models does not entail imposing *one* model (even one with four or five variants) on all historical phenomena. A more modest cultural theory would treat its models as taxonomic categories any one of which may, depending on the findings of empirical—which is to say historical—investigation, turn out to be an empty set.

Ellis presents a plausible analysis of some of the ideological dynamics of the egalitarian Abolitionist sects he and Aaron Wildavsky

have studied. But the ability of Cultural Theory to explain those dynamics hardly justifies its claim to explain every culture in history. Restricting ourselves to the relatively inconsequential category (sects) Ellis uses to show the importance of egalitarian social relations in creating modern cultural biases, David Koresh recently reminded us that plenty of *nonegalitarian* sects “demonize the outside world as utterly vile” (120n51). What Cultural Theory would have to treat as an anomaly is, however, perfectly understandable (if not predictable) in light of the contingent history of sectarian *Protestantism*.

Moreover, one does not need Cultural Theory to discern the group psychology particular even to egalitarian sects. At least one such analysis was published 20 years before Cultural Theory came along;⁹ *all* of *Cultural Theory's* (sparse) historical data, in fact, are drawn from scholars, such as Eugene Genovese, Edward Banfield, and Lucien Pye, who managed to reach their understanding of the data without the globalist accoutrements of Mary Douglas's grids and groups. Nor, when Ellis uses Cultural Theory to explicate the methodologically modest history produced by such scholars, is our understanding of the data appreciably enhanced. He writes that Genovese's explication of the slaveowning culture of the nineteenth-century South “contradicts Friedman's claim that ‘by the modern era’ there had emerged ‘an ideal that was plausible to people regardless of their social ways of life: the ideal of individual equality’” (89–90). Yet Ellis must retreat from his broad initial attack on my argument when he considers what my argument actually says. I did not claim that *inegalitarian* social relations could never produce hierarchical cultural biases; I did claim, however, that we have no reason to think this is a significant phenomenon in modern Western societies—of which the antebellum South is not one. Once Ellis remembers this, he turns to chiding me for failing to falsify a hypothesis for which one might think it is his burden at least to make a *prima facie* case (90). But it seems to me that I have already falsified it, by pointing to the adherence of modern Westerners to egalitarian ideas regardless of their social background.

Similar points could be made about Ellis's classroom survey of prison inmates and car salesmen and his discussion of the egalitarian social relations displayed in various leftist activist groups. As with Southern culture, Ellis quickly realizes that these phenomena do not meet my argument. They may, after all, prove “nothing about the social constraint on cognition because it is not the social relations that account for the values but the values that account for the social relations” (90).

What, then, have we learned from Ellis's applications of Cultural Theory to history? Only that (1) "if the individual decision to join a particular group cannot be explained as a product of that particular group's social relations, neither does an individual come to that decision in a social vacuum"—a proposition I would never dispute; and that (2) "the individual's decision to join is already embedded in a preferred set of social relations and values stemming from family, work, friends, and school" (91). Except for Ellis's unjustified (i.e., question-begging) decision to exclude from this list such cultural influences as books, movies, television, and other institutions that do not rely on the direct interpersonal contact privileged by Cultural Theory, this is exactly what I claimed. What is it, then, that compels Ellis to rule out the influence of such institutions? Presumably it is the fact that allowing that preferences are shaped by such historically contingent, tradition-transmitting and -shaping institutions would stymie the ambition to predict cultural phenomena *a priori*.

Ellis writes that rejecting theories that are as (putatively) predictive as Cultural Theory "is a sure recipe for making history antiquarian if not unintelligible" (98). One could easily list an honor roll of historians thereby condemned as antiquarians, among whom would be all of those Ellis tries to enlist on the side of Cultural Theory. Surely history need not consist of theories equally applicable to past and present in order to be relevant to a modern reader. A theory about, say, the particular causes of World War I, despite its unique applicability and purely retrodictive capacity, helps explain matters of enormous contemporary relevance: Lenin's success in Russia and thus the rise of Communist states, the roots of Nazi Germany and thus of the postwar world, and so forth. It would seem that Ellis can only imagine bestowing relevance on the past by using it, as did the didactic historians who wrote before the great nineteenth-century German historiographical revolution, to exemplify the lawlike applicability of universally relevant categories, whether moral or empirical. This approach overlooks the possibility of studying the past in order to uncover the contingencies that gave birth to the present. And as for the supposed unintelligibility of nonglobalist historiography, a test is at hand. My claim that the Western ideology of egalitarian individualism escapes Cultural Theory's typology is itself a nonglobalist hypothesis about a unique historical development. Ellis disagrees with this hypothesis; but the very fact that he can do so (by criticizing my interpretations of Marx, Foucault, multiculturalism, and so on) suggests that he finds it perfectly intelligible.

That hypothesis is, of course, only one example of the thousands of methodologically modest theories historians have offered to make sense of human action at various times and places. Taken together, these interpretations do not begin to do justice to the complexity of the past. But complexity is not unintelligibility. Certainly we need “theories” in the sense of Kantian categories that bring some order to the otherwise unmanageable influx of raw data. But this no more legitimizes a priori historical theories than it justifies a priori theories of chemistry or biology. There is nothing wrong with “a bewildering diversity of concepts and social relations” (88) when we are dealing with a reality as complicated as human history. There is something quite wrong with concluding that history is only relevant or understandable if ordered by categories that exclude the influence of such contingencies as path-dependent cultural traditions.

History vs. Cultural Theory

I argued that *Cultural Theory*’s globalism trades historical complexity for relentless anachronism. Ellis not only overlooks this aspect of my critique but unintentionally confirms it, writing for instance that “individualists criticize egalitarianism for stifling individual initiative, infringing on individual liberty, and neglecting the need for wealth creation” (85)—as if this is the sort of argument a Comanche might have made.

Such anachronisms are what led me to wonder if, “like Weber’s ideal types,” *Cultural Theory*’s categories might be “intended as heuristic abstractions from reality that, depending on the results of historical research, may or may not find any, or many, actual exemplars.” But I could find no escape from the conclusion that *Cultural Theory* purports to be “applicable to all societies in human history.”¹⁰ This is explicit, I wrote, in the authors’ claim that

“each way of life needs each of its rivals, either to make up for its deficiencies, or to exploit, or to define itself against.” Since the ways of life are inseparable from the cultures they spawn, one should find the five cultures, too, exemplified in any and every society. Wherever we look, we should be able to find the various ways of life, each generating the corresponding culture, engaged in a never-ending struggle with the others to justify itself. In that case, why don’t the authors give us examples of non-modern, non-Western societies in which the five cultures actually did coexist, or of modern Western societies in which the various cultures actually spring from five different ways of life?¹¹

The evidence Ellis now provides falls far short of what his globalist theory requires. Even without their all-encompassing ambitions, Cultural Theorists would need more than a handful of examples in order to establish the usefulness of their theory as a research hypothesis. But when they claim that Cultural Theory is always and everywhere applicable, their burden is not just to provide many examples, but to refute all counterexamples. Neither Banfield's fatalistic Italian village and Pye's Chinese "egalitarianism," recounted in *Cultural Theory*, nor the five new cases Ellis enumerates in his reply begin to discharge either burden. Cultural Theorists have yet to adduce a single example of a premodern, non-Western society in which all five ways of life coexisted. And the relative independence of ideas from social relations in modern, Western society invalidates Cultural Theory in one stroke.

I acknowledged that "there have, of course, been egalitarian societies—for instance, . . . the chieftainless bands [such as the Cherokees Ellis now cites] that predated the development of organized government." But not only do these societies fail to live up to the Cultural Theory postulate that the five ways of life are always and everywhere in an antagonistic interdependence; there is also the fact that, as I wrote, "egalitarianism as a cultural ideal is a very different matter" from egalitarianism as a mode of social organization: the former, unlike the latter, is peculiarly modern. "Much the same," I contended, "can be said of individualism."¹² Ellis responds in four ways.

First, he writes that he would not be "desperately disappointed if it turned out that the categories of Cultural Theory applied only to the industrializing or industrial societies of the West" (561). This is a startling retreat from the globalism Ellis claims is needed to escape anti-quarianism and unintelligibility, and it deprives Cultural Theory of its logic. If anything justifies Ellis's insistence that egalitarianism and individualism are discontinuous, as against my claim that individualism is an early, incomplete form of egalitarianism that fails to extend individual freedom from the political to the economic realm, it is his belief that individualism and egalitarianism are two out of four or five universally recurring categories. By allowing that these two categories may be peculiarly modern, Ellis unwittingly suggests that, far from stemming from a sophisticated understanding of the need for historiography to be guided by theory, his paradigm actually exemplifies a crude empiricism that unreflectively elevates certain "obvious" modern, Western notions, such as individualism and egalitarianism, into timeless, placeless universals.

Second, Ellis argues that universalism, by which I meant the belief

in the universal and equal dignity of human individuals as such, is not as uniquely Western as I claim—witness universalistic Islam on the one hand and Western relativism on the other. It is true that if one classifies Islam as non-Western—despite its origins in the religious tradition to which I attribute Western universalism—then universalism is not uniquely Western; but the point is that like Christianity, Islam is the result of contingent historical circumstances, not the timeless imperatives of social organization. As for relativism, I did not claim that universalism is the *only* constituent of Western culture; pointing to a different constituent, even a philosophically contradictory one, is therefore a non sequitur.

Third, Ellis reminds us of Pye's view that the premodern Chinese were sufficiently egalitarian to prepare the way for universalistic Chinese Communism. But if premodern attitudes were compatible with, or even conducive to modern ideals, this in no sense establishes that the two are equivalent. All modern attitudes must ultimately have premodern roots, but we can still distinguish usefully between them. Russian peasants under Stalin could undoubtedly find in collective farms echoes of their pre-Revolution *mirs*, but this hardly equates their attitudes to those of American social workers under Bill Clinton. Neither the greed of premodern merchants nor the communitarian leveling of premodern villagers is equivalent to the universalistic egalitarian individualism of the modern West. Once we notice the difference universalism makes, we can see that modern individualism, unlike premodern market greed, is inconsistent and contains the seeds of its supersession by modern egalitarianism.

Even accepting the equivalence of modern ideals and premodern attitudes for the sake of argument, though, does not solve the problem of Cultural Theory's ahistoricism. For if premodern social conditions *could* generate the same ideals as modern ones, what would this say about Cultural Theory's claim that cultural biases are inseparable from the corresponding social relations? Here the question is not just whether Cultural Theory's categories are so capacious as to be "fuzzy or vague" (101), but whether they compare apples and oranges by grouping attitudes with different social causes—or no (narrowly) social causes at all. Thus, I wrote that while it would compromise Cultural Theory's global claims if premodern Chinese egalitarianism differs in kind from the Western variety,

it is even worse if Chinese and Western individualism and egalitarianism do *not* differ from each other in kind. In the last paragraph of [*Cultural Theory*]

the authors ask what would count as evidence against Cultural Theory. Their answer: "Most damaging would be a demonstration that values are little constrained by institutional relationships. If the same cultural biases thrived in dissimilar social contexts or, conversely, if dissimilar biases existed in similar social contexts, then our faith in cultural theory would be greatly weakened." But surely that is exactly what is shown if Chinese and Western individualism and egalitarianism are similar in kind. . . . For there could hardly be more dissimilar social contexts than, on the one hand, the . . . Chinese villages that gave birth to "egalitarian" peasant rebellions; and, on the other hand, the urbanized, industrialized, atomized market societies inhabited by . . . modern Western egalitarians.¹³

Ellis does not respond, and he actually adds new evidence that "values are little constrained by institutional [*sic*] relationships." I have already noted Ellis's concession that in modern societies, egalitarian group affiliations may follow from, rather than cause, egalitarian values (90-91). But in listing some of the many instances in which modern individuals are subjected to conflicting social relations—which would be bad enough for Cultural Theory as predictor of attitudes—he implicitly shows that such relations may well be *irrelevant* to people's values. "Those who prefer egalitarianism," for instance, may work in "large-scale hierarchical bureaucracies"—so where did their egalitarian preference come from? "Those who identify with competitive individualism" may find themselves in the army—so how does this identification survive? Ellis acknowledges only that these "peculiar problems," which the final paragraph of *Cultural Theory* admits would contradict the theory, are "interesting questions for future research" (93-94).

Ellis claims to see "history as the field upon which theory is tested" (96), but it doesn't seem to matter if the theory fails the test.

Two Versions of Cultural Theory

In the long passage just quoted, and elsewhere, I argued that the modern independence of individualist and egalitarian ideas from social relations falsifies Cultural Theory's reduction of "cultural biases" to "social relations" or "ways of life." Ellis's fourth response is to deny that Cultural Theory postulates such a reduction. He does this in two ways: by highlighting the significance of the "surprise" theory of change; and by pointing to the first paragraph of *Cultural Theory*, which distinguishes "ways of life" from social relations: thus, according to Ellis, the theory's reduction of cultural biases to ways of life is not social reductionism.

The latter claim leads Ellis into a methodological quagmire that demands careful inspection. The question is whether the ways of life to which his theory ascribes culture are synonymous with social relations, or whether, as suggested in paragraph 1, a way of life is “a viable combination of social relations and cultural bias.”

My critique of *Cultural Theory* ignored this suggestion because the authors ignore it, too. I refer the reader back to my quotation (on p. 138 above) from the last paragraph of the book, in which the only two variables are cultural biases and social relations. Not only do ways of life make no appearance, but if, as Ellis now argues, they are a causal factor in their own right, rescuing Cultural Theory from social determinism, then the quotation would make no sense: if “the same cultural biases thrived in dissimilar social contexts or, conversely, if dissimilar biases existed in similar social contexts,” this would *not* falsify Cultural Theory, as the authors said it would, for according to Ellis, Cultural Theory never claimed that social contexts determine cultural biases in the first place.

One need not go to the end of the book to find the authors treating their theory as socially reductionist, however. The fifth paragraph, for instance, includes this passage:

A way of life will remain viable only if it inculcates in its constituent individuals the cultural bias that justifies it. Conversely (for we do not want to assign priority one way or the other), individuals, if they wish to make a way of life for themselves, must negotiate a set of values and beliefs capable of supporting that way of life.

As in the final paragraph, only two factors appear in paragraph 5, but in this case the two are not social relations and cultural biases, but ways of life and cultural biases. Rather than summarizing a separate relationship between social relations and cultural biases, as suggested in paragraph 1, here ways of life directly interact with cultural biases—exactly as social relations interacted with cultural biases in paragraph 1. One may reasonably conclude that the authors have already dropped their original distinction between social relations and ways of life and are now equating the two. The parenthetical phrase in the second sentence of the quotation from paragraph 5, giving priority neither to cultural bias nor to *way of life*, makes this particularly evident, since it precisely parallels the statement in paragraph 1 that “causal priority, in our conception of ways of life, is given neither to cultural bias nor to *social relations*” (emphasis added).

Presumably both advocates and critics of Cultural Theory find it

easy to ignore the distinction between social relations and ways of life because the third term (way of life) adds nothing to the other two (social relation and cultural bias): paragraph 1 defines way of life as the sum of the other two, but this sum is no greater than its parts. The third term is necessary, however, for as between the other two, the authors "do not want to assign priority one way or the other." Why is this? Why, by the same token, do they avoid discussions of causality, preferring to speak of "relationships" (88), "connections" (89), or "correspondences"¹⁴ between cultural biases and social relations?

It is clear enough why Cultural Theory must withhold causal priority from cultural bias: this is the theory's dependent variable. "Where do preferences come from?" *Cultural Theory* asks. "This is the great unanswered question in the social sciences. Indeed, it is the great unasked question."¹⁵ Since apart from biases/preferences the only other real variable (that is, one that, unlike "way of life," is not obviously analyzable in terms of the others) is social relations, I understood these to constitute the independent variable. Ellis now rejects this understanding of Cultural Theory as a "caricature": the theory never posited "a causal arrow running only from social relations to ideas," he claims, and he condemns me for advocating, as the alternative to Cultural Theory, "an equally one-sided model in which ideas determine social relations" (91).

Now in truth, by pointing out that in the modern world ideas tend to be independent of social relations, I did not suggest that this is always and everywhere the case. Nor did I claim that disembodied "ideas" are *ever* causal, any more than that social relations as impersonal "forces" are. Both ideas and social relations act on us through institutions that embody cultural traditions. Cultural tradition is my third term. Unlike the paragraph 1 definition of ways of life, this term adds something to the other two: historicity. That is, it explains how, *depending on contingent circumstances*, the causal arrow between ideas and social contexts can go in either direction.

The ideas that shape people must pass through some sort of social embodiment, whether written, spoken, or broadcast. Ideas must be "institutionalized" in order to affect people: they must be propounded by authors, families, teachers, preachers, reporters. Conversely, people's social relations are not autonomous: they "act" upon us only when mediated by ideas that legitimate actions to their actors. One never directly confronts a social relation: a law, for instance, would be a dead letter unless people were persuaded by cultural institutions either to obey or enforce it. Social consensus allows capitalist acts

between consenting adults; political consensus allows states to regulate these acts.

This understanding of cultural institutions recognizes that both ideas and social relations depend on human action; it makes free will at least a logical possibility in both realms. Human beings create laws and languages; as participants in our own “determination” by these “forces,” we are inherently free to try to change them. In practice, most people rarely alter the ideas or customs given to them by their cultural institutions, but the fact that culture is a concatenation of human actions makes it susceptible to change in principle, if only by means of one’s internal dialogue with it.¹⁶ The freedom to change our ideas and practices is what makes cultural institutions historical—temporally *variable* embodiments of human action.

If one were not socialized into an ongoing culture, but only into the direct personal relationships one has with one’s parents, classmates, and coworkers, Cultural Theory might make sense. But Cultural Theory, strangely enough, arbitrarily refuses to notice the effect of indirect social relations, such as those between authors and readers; that is, Cultural Theory ignores the effect of culture. But since the indirect, cultural relations given to one generation can be altered before being passed on to the next, history is possible—and predictions of the course of history, past or future, impossible. “When we seek to know history in advance, we deprive it of its own dimension, which is action; and, when we say action, we are also saying unpredictability” (Raymond Aron).¹⁷ The point of my methodological critique of Cultural Theory was not that ideas invariably cause social relations, but that both factors are forms of culture that cannot be abstracted from history. One discovers this by observing the embodiment of both factors in cultural institutions.

Officially, Cultural Theory accepts our freedom from determinism. While it does not take a Hegelian determinism by ideas (or by the Idea) seriously, it does take the vulgar Marxist inversion of Hegel seriously, and disagrees with it sharply: Cultural Theory admirably rejects the plausibility of any complete social determination of ideas, while recognizing that often, people are predisposed toward certain ideas by their social relations. But in practice—in its fifth paragraph, in its final paragraph, and throughout *Cultural Theory*—Cultural Theory collapses into determinism, for by eschewing cultural institutions susceptible to alteration by human action, it leaves no room for the possibility that a cultural bias, affirmed at one point in the history of a culture

through the variety of cultural institutions, may, by a cumulative process of change, be rejected later.

I wrote that “the real problem” with Cultural Theory “is not the direction(s) of the causal arrow. The problem is the absence of a middle term, intersubjective culture, which introduces historical contingency into what people find reasonable.”¹⁸ By trying to reinstate the abandoned definition of ways of life given in the book’s first paragraph, Ellis may now be seen as trying to rectify this shortcoming and supply a middle term that is more than the sum of the other two. The same can be said of his statement that “when *Cultural Theory* speaks of preferences being derived from ways of life, we are not saying that social relations determine culture, but rather that social relations and cultural bias together shape preferences” (92). No matter how one multiplies the labels denoting explanans and explanandum or tries to designate the correspondence between them as a factor in itself, there are only two distinguishable variables at work in Cultural Theory—cultural biases and social relations—and if biases do not determine relations, then no “relationship” between biases and relations that does not embrace a genuine third factor can allow for the freedom that leads to historical change.

The authors write in *Cultural Theory*’s second paragraph that “relations and biases are reciprocal, interacting, and mutually reinforcing.” This suggests that both relations and biases push in the same direction. Once egalitarianism is embodied in viable egalitarian social relations, it will keep going: egalitarian social relations lead to egalitarian ideas that reproduce egalitarian social relations. Assuming that cultural biases are the dependent variable, this scenario supplies the authors with an independent variable, social relations, to explain cultural biases at any given point in time. This is social determinism, which Ellis now calls a caricature of Cultural Theory. His alternative answer to the great question of the source of preferences is social relations *plus* preferences: in other words, the first paragraph’s definition of ways of life. But if there is no other factor that can set preferences on a path that is independent, at least in part, from social relations, then social relations *plus* preferences is the same thing as social relations *simpliciter*, and we are back to social determinism.

The second paragraph of the book, however, while presenting the “mutual reinforcement” formula that implies social determinism, also provides Ellis the basis for reinterpreting Cultural Theory’s view of causality—yet another way of avoiding its reductionist implications. This basis is the seemingly commonsensical claim that giving one

factor causal priority over the other would be like choosing the chicken over the egg.

Now in the chicken-egg paradox there is causal priority *at any given time*. In paragraph 2, the authors seem to recognize this, for the lesson they draw from the paradox is that one need not bother with the historical origins of a way of life, since *the causal arrow points the same way no matter where one begins*: that is to say, it points toward whichever of the five categories is displayed by *either* cultural biases or social relations, since each pushes the other in the same direction. But if cultural biases are the dependent variable, this view yields social determinism, because the unidirectional arrow is path independent. To avoid determinism while retaining path independence, Ellis finds a different lesson in the chicken-egg paradox: to him, it shows not that causality always goes in one direction, but that there is no such thing as “stark either-or” causality (91). This is true—if the paradox is viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, from God’s perspective, according to which there is neither temporality nor causality. But when confronting an actual, historical chicken, the causality could not be more stark: it was caused by an egg. In the paragraph-1, “timeless” methodology Ellis now defends, the temporal sequence chicken-egg-chicken, and therefore the notion of causality itself, becomes literally inconceivable. To ensure that ways of life describe only a vague chicken-egg “correspondence,” Ellis flattens history into an eternal, uncaused omelette.

My alternative to the choice between unidirectional, ahistorical reductionism and the repudiation of causality altogether involves admitting that historical contingencies can *change* the relationship between ideas and their social contexts. Thus, one might argue that while in nineteenth-century Russia, peasant social relations largely determined peasant cultural biases, the series of contingent events culminating in the Bolshevik Revolution created a cultural institution, the Party-state, which was so powerful that the ideas it enforced became largely determinative of subsequent peasant social relations. This alternative allows causation to re-emerge from the indeterminate egg-chicken “way of life” described in paragraph 1.

Ellis himself nearly endorses this alternative when he tries to explain the actual nature of one of the “relationships” posited by Cultural Theory. Only at the last moment does he pull back from temporality, repudiating historical explanation in favor of extracausal “connections.” Describing egalitarian sects, he writes that “people choose to structure their social relations in a manner consistent with their egalitarian bias (cultural bias → social relations) but end up having a hard

time keeping the group together in the absence of authority and so demonize the outside world." The first clause ("people choose") begins a temporal narrative; as a result, Ellis is able to provide a clear diagram of the causal relationship involved. But after the second clause ("demonize the outside world"), where the summary diagram should logically read, "cultural bias $\rightarrow$ social relations $\rightarrow$ cultural bias," Ellis evades the question of causation by writing instead: "social relations + cultural bias (way of life) $\rightarrow$ cultural bias" (91). Only by once more collapsing explanans and explanandum into "way of life" does he steer clear of history on the one side and, on the other, the monocausal reductionism (in this case of social context to ideas!) that would follow from globalizing his first diagram. But this means scrambling his eggs and chickens. A more reasonable analysis of Ellis's narrative would admit that ideas determined social relations in the first moment, but would reserve the right to find at a later point in time—pending empirical investigation—a reversal, in whole or in part, of causality. But the path-dependent indeterminacy of this view, resolvable only through historical research, would open up the possibility of falsifying Cultural Theory in a given instance.

From Social Reductionism to Atomistic Individualism

Despite his reliance on paragraph 1, Ellis has not abandoned social reductionism: witness his search for social determinants of the ideas of slave owners, car salesmen, and social activists to rebut my claim for the relative autonomy of modern culture. This search, one recalls, culminated in Ellis's list of what I would designate as cultural institutions that influence people's biases. By restricting this list to institutions of unmediated personal interaction, however, Ellis implies that what we learn from school or family is only *its mode of social organization*—not the (historically variable) values and assumptions conveyed in school by reading and overt instruction and at home by conversation and parental behavior. If this implication is valid, then social activists, rather than coming from families that *taught* egalitarian values, must have come from families with a peculiarly egalitarian *structure*. But Ellis presents no evidence that this is the case. He suggests that this is not because social relations are relatively unrelated to modern cultural biases, but because the multiplicity of social relations in modern society overdetermines our cultural biases. But this difficulty, Ellis argues, confronts any cultural theory: while "modern soci-

ety . . . does pose peculiar problems" for Cultural Theory, "these difficulties . . . are not peculiar to Cultural Theory; rather they confront any theory that attempts to relate how people live to how people think" (94). Ellis's equivocation over whether modernity is or is not a peculiar problem for Cultural Theory is less objectionable than his assumption that any attempt to "relate" ideas to social contexts will be confounded by the multiple social relations of modernity; this is only true if one insists on reducing biases to relations. Behind the methodological ambiguity of the word "relate" lurks social determinism. Otherwise, the "relationship" could be minimal or variable.

But repudiating "stark either-or" causality in favor of vague "relationships" is not Ellis's only way around reductionism. There is as well Cultural Theory's "surprise" theory of change. My critique of Cultural Theory mistakenly assumed that surprise was integrated into Cultural Theory's social determinism. I thought Cultural Theorists envision people living most of their lives in dogmatic slumber, but that this sleep is occasionally interrupted by collisions with a recalcitrant reality; at such junctures, we atomistically compare our present means to our pre-given ends and calculate that the former are inadequate. I now see that Cultural Theory's soporific and hyperrationalistic visions are self-contained; they do not represent contradictory moments in our lives, but are two contradictory ways of looking at the world painted by the theory. Thus, when one decides to dissent from the social relations one previously "preferred," one is not awakening from a socially determined sleep; rather, one is acting in the same radically individualistic manner that allows Cultural Theorists to say that one "chooses" the preferences that "correspond" to one's social relations in the first place.

Ellis is shocked that I see this choice-making process as atomistic: how can I so characterize a view that is, after all, grounded in (if not determined by) social relations (uo)? Here Ellis trades on Cultural Theory's unresolved ambiguities, for social grounding takes place only in the deterministic version of Cultural Theory—which, of course, Ellis repudiates as a caricature. A Cultural Theorist can usefully oscillate between the two versions, however. Thus, while Ellis affirms our inability to transcend our socially given "traditions" (i.e. ways of life, i.e. social relations), he also posits individuals engaged in comparison shopping among them, never explaining how, if one's cultural bias is a function of one's social relations, one can so easily free oneself from them in order to view from afar the "competing norms and values within a society," "compar[ing]" one's own "with other biases." In-

deed, even as Ellis assures us that “there is no way of thinking outside of some tradition” (he is right to worry that this places him in the same camp as Stanley Fish and postmodernism), he claims that “conflict between rival cultures” “raise[s] fundamental beliefs to the surface where they can”—somehow—“be examined and probed” (114).¹⁹

It still seems to me that the surprises that (contravening Ellis’s injunction against extratraditional thinking) set in motion this probing examination—so that he can claim that Cultural Theory allows a role to “historical contingency” (110)—must be either too atomistic to permit historical continuity or too culturally mediated to permit a priori prediction. On the one hand, perhaps surprises are directly perceived by people, unmediated by the interpretations of journalists, filmmakers, scholars, family members, or friends. In that case, there would be no way for these interpretations to affect a culture’s subsequent trajectory, so we would have contingency so radical that it could not be called history. But this possibility requires direct contact between people and “events in the real world” (108). If such contact is impossible for historians—who must rely on theories to sort out the inflow of data—how is it possible for the objects of their studies? Yet if people’s perception of reality must be mediated by theories, then even surprises must be culturally mediated. And in that case, we cannot predict how people will react to surprises without knowledge of the interpretive traditions through which a given surprise will be mediated at a given place and time. I assume this is why Ellis is silent about my argument that *Cultural Theory’s* use of the Cambridge Apostles to show surprise theory at work ignores the role the altruistic ideals of English civilization may have played in making Kim Philby et al. into communists.²⁰

I see no reason to revise my conclusion that Cultural Theory relies on a naive portrait of

the *Zweckrationale* individual, who receives the stimulus to changing his or her mind not from autonomous or semi-autonomous cultural influences, but from *reality itself*; and who, in deciding upon his or her new means-preferences, draws solely on the unmediated observation of reality. This is the only way that change could be allowed to enter an exogenously deterministic model without letting in history along with it.²¹

Ellis and I agree that individuals are largely but not inescapably determined, but because Ellis ignores the historically variable cultural institutions that do the determining, he cannot, without falling into atomistic individualism, describe how we can modify or repudiate our traditions. Hence a theory seeking to answer “the great unasked ques-

tion . . . Where do preferences come from?" ends up taking "as givens . . . why Milton Friedman prefers a competitive individualist way of life and Ralph Nader prefers an egalitarian way of life" (107).

From the Formation of Preferences to Their Packaging

But Ellis is unperturbed: Cultural Theory "may not be able to explain why one brother prefers egalitarianism and the other prefers individualism," he writes, "but once we know about the preference for egalitarianism, Cultural Theory enables us to predict a large number of other preferences" (108). In short: forget about Cultural Theory's claim to be able to tell us where preferences *come from*; what Cultural Theory really tells us is how preferences *are bundled together*. Thus, Ellis attributes the Jacksonians' "preference for limited government" to "(1) their commitment to a way of life based on relatively equal conditions, and (2) the historically contingent belief that government was a source of inequality" (97, emphasis removed). Since both the Jacksonians' initial preferences and their beliefs about the best means of achieving them are treated as givens, Cultural Theory's generalizations turn out to concern merely the pattern of ideas—the shapes of the bundles—that are likely to be held by people who are already, for unknown reasons, egalitarians, individualists, and so on. Generalizations of this sort verge on the trivial: do we really require Cultural Theory to tell us that if someone is precommitted to equality and sees the government as a source of inequality, she will seek to limit government? That in the midst of the Great Depression, the faith of erstwhile capitalists may have been shaken? That when Communist societies fail to produce prosperity and equality, they will become "plagued by self-doubt and defections" (109)? While the determinist version of Cultural Theory purports to explain virtually everything, the nondeterminist version explains almost nothing.

The point of the nondeterminist version is that the preferences contained in the packages called individualism, egalitarianism, hierarchism, and fatalism "cannot be mixed and matched."²² But why not? If the freely choosing individual can select an internally consistent worldview in response to a surprise, why not also an inconsistent one? This question is answered in *Cultural Theory*, paragraph 4: "Shared values and beliefs are thus not free to come together in any which way; they are always closely tied to the social relations they help legitimate." An unwary reader might think that this "close tie" is a causal one,

yielding social determinism, but now we know better. In the nondeterminist, noncausal version of the theory, it seems that people bundle their preferences *as if* they were determined by social relations, but no actual social relations need be at work after all. Hence, Wildavsky can write a penetrating analysis of the political attitudes of “egalitarian” media elites that pays no attention whatever to whether the source of their views is egalitarian social relations (rather than, say, the content of their Ivy League educations).²³ The two versions of Cultural Theory operate independently of each other, but they also, somehow, rely on each other: *social relations hold together the bundles of preferences, but without causing them—or even existing*. They are occult forces, convenient fictions—or else they are real causes, and my initial critique of the theory’s determinism is intact.

Ellis expounds the nondeterminist version of the theory while continuing to defend its reductionist version against my “impossibly high standards” (106). It does count for something, he writes, to reduce ideas to social relations; it would be childish to expect more of an historical explanation than that. The example he chooses to illustrate this claim could not have been more unfortunate: it happens that the question of why the Dutch are so clean (107) has been explained brilliantly by Simon Schama as a function of specific path-dependent cultural factors.²⁴ Yes: like a curious child, one might want to know the origins of the contingencies Schama invokes, and the origins of those origins—and why not? Pursuing such questions, which is exactly what modern historians do, has unearthed a wealth of answers to the question of the sources of people’s preferences. What is so inadequate about cultural and intellectual historiography that Cultural Theory is required as a remedy? One suspects that in their preoccupation with the “social science” literature, Cultural Theorists are unaware that there are hundreds of important books like Schama’s that go a long way toward explaining modern preferences by tracing their early modern and medieval roots. Indeed, authors Ellis cites for their methodological writings, such as Pocock, Skinner, and Gordon Wood, have produced justly renowned works of history that manage to illuminate the sources of modern political “preferences” without recourse to any a priori, predictive schemas (let alone to Cultural Theory, which would either have to treat the republican tradition they identify as a gigantic anomaly, or else simplify it beyond recognition into “egalitarianism” and explain it as “corresponding to” imaginary egalitarian social contexts). As these works show, attention to social context by no stretch

of the imagination entails the imposition of universally applicable social categories onto unpredictable, path-dependent history.

From Methodology to Ideology

There is no room here to air fully all the methodological questions Ellis's reply raises, but clearly he gives us no reason to throw history overboard in pursuit of universal cultural predictions. Another, not unrelated reason to stick with traditional historical method is found in Cultural Theory's profound inability to detach itself from contemporary political controversies. Cultural Theory may, as I wrote, "mirror contemporary political alignments better than the conventional left-right dichotomy,"²⁵ but to mirror is not to understand. Nobel prizes are not often awarded for unwittingly mimicking the very phenomena that need to be explained.

I suggested that beneath the clash of contemporary ideologies lie common egalitarian individualist assumptions bequeathed to us by our historical tradition. Ellis rejects this approach because he thinks it fails to explain the differences between the warring parties. But in its non-reductionist mode, Cultural Theory merely *describes* their differences — and not very well. And while in its reductionist mode, it explains their differences, it does so only by recourse to unproven and implausible social bases.

When Ellis as reductionist ascribes egalitarian ideas to egalitarian social relations, writing that Cultural Theory allows us to "derive [*sic*] the egalitarian mode of social organization from social dimensions" (84), he is simply not credible for reasons already discussed. When Ellis as nonreductionist describes egalitarians as people who "wish their lives to be bounded by a collectivity" (85) more than individualists do, he is tendentious: egalitarians tend to be *statists*, but this is not because they like being restrained, but because they think the market binds people even more tightly and the state can loosen those chains. As no less a canonical egalitarian than John Rawls writes, the question of how to specify just terms of cooperation between people viewed as "free *and* equal persons . . . has been the focus of the liberal critique of aristocracy, of the socialist critique of liberal constitutionalist democracy, and of the conflict between liberals and conservatives at the present time over the claims of private property and the legitimacy (in contrast to the effectiveness) of social policies associated with the so-called welfare state" (emphasis added).²⁶ Thus, to assume that those on

the left are any less concerned with individual freedom than those on the right is simply to reiterate "the familiar right-wing claim that freedom and equality are conflicting ideals," in the words of G. A. Cohen.²⁷ Cultural Theory, by elevating a right-wing view of the left-right divide into timeless wisdom, demonstrates how beholden it is to the very phenomena it is attempting to investigate. This is, of course, because it affords no historical perspective on them.

Examined historically, "individualism" and "egalitarianism" are two sides of the same coin. This is old news to sociologists, although Ellis attempts to dissociate that discipline from an appreciation of cultural history. Hence one of the precursors of modern sociology, Lorenz von Stein, writing in 1850:

As the opportunities for the education of the working class improve, a point will be reached at which the idea of *equality* emerges. . . . The origin of this idea . . . signifies the moment when the principle of liberty becomes opposed to the foundation of the social order.

Legal equality entitled everybody to establish his own enterprise on the basis of his savings. The road to capital ownership was open. Independence made everybody depend upon his own devices, his abilities, his industriousness and his thrift. This became the source of his self-improvement. . . . This, however, was only the negative side of liberty; its realization depended upon the fact of whether the laborer had any real chance of acquiring capital. Without this possibility the working class was, in spite of its independence, excluded from the rule over society and from developing a free personality; without this opportunity the principle of freedom was a delusion, even a mockery for the working class.

To illustrate the point that not only socialists and communists recognize very clearly the relationship of contemporary industry to the concepts of liberty and equality, and particularly as related to the working class, we quote here one of the many statements of modern French literature before the Revolution of 1848. . . . "Why are not all citizens personally free? Because there are many who, driven by hunger, are forced to sell themselves at the first opportunity. . . . These mute and unhappy pariahs suffer on their long journey with us, because their only choice is one between suffering and dying, and it is a man's instinct not to die. They continue to live, it is true, but at the risk of starvation like slaves who only respond to the threat of the whip. These people, I have to state it again, are no free citizens."²⁸

Again, consider Georg Simmel's more abstract characterization of the same historical configuration—the liberal ideology of the modern West:

Freedom and equality can be seen to belong together by right from the very outset. For if universal humanity — natural-law man, as it were — exists as the essential core of every man, who is individualized by empirical traits, social position, and accidental configuration, all one need do is *free* him from all these historical influences and diversions that ravage his deepest essence, and then what is common to all, man as such, can emerge in him as this essence.

Here lies the pivotal point of this concept of individuality. . . . Whether it is nature, reason, or man, it is always something shared with others in which the individual discovers himself when he has discovered his own freedom, his own selfhood.

To be sure . . . their equality, by which their freedom was justified, never did exist in reality as accomplished fact, and at the instant individuals received unlimited freedom, unmistakable inequality would generate a new repression. . . . Only through the voluntary act of renunciation expressed in [the concept of *fraternité*] . . . would it be possible to prevent *liberté* from being accompanied by the total opposite of *égalité*.²⁹

Von Stein and Simmel underscore the logic that is peculiar to egalitarian individualism: liberty and equality make no sense without each other. While the liberty of an egoist who thinks only she has rights contradicts equality, this is not true of the liberty of one who accepts the right of all others to equal liberty — and that is what Western liberals accept. This egalitarianism can be expressed in terms of each individual's freedom, just as individual freedom can be seen as each individual's equal entitlement. As Durkheim put it, individualism

is the glorification not of the self but of the individual in general. It springs not from egoism but from sympathy for all that is human, a broader pity for all sufferings, for all human miseries, a more ardent need to combat them and mitigate them, a greater thirst for justice.³⁰

Egalitarianism is implicit in the idea of *universal* individual liberty; both logically and historically, the two have been bound together in liberalism. As Rawls's recounting of the progress of liberal thought reminds us, the full implications of egalitarian individualism were not immediately recognized. But as a logical consequence of Western assumptions, these implications were bound to emerge, at least as ideals, in time. It was, I suggest, an attempt to explain the leftward trajectory of modern Western civilization that prompted von Stein, Simmel, and Durkheim to analyze the logic of liberalism. In the light of this analysis, it is not mysterious why our culture, and particularly those who

are most immersed in its traditions—intellectuals—keep moving toward more radical forms of equal individual freedom.

What is less obvious is why some people resist this tendency, refusing to accept the connection between the individualism they champion and the egalitarianism they oppose. Since there is no evidence that they come from more individualistic social backgrounds and every indication that they are exposed to such unusual cultural influences as free-market economics, or what Rawls calls arguments against the “effectiveness” of the welfare state, parsimony demands that we view culture, not social relations, as the independent variable explaining not only what Cultural Theory calls “egalitarianism” but what it calls “individualism.” Cultural Theory’s individualists are people who, having been exposed to different cultural influences than most of their contemporaries, defend their free-market views by means of a misguided appropriation of the rhetoric of liberty. It is misguided because it fails to recognize that their opponents, even more consistently than they themselves, are individualists: unlike von Stein, Simmel, Durkheim, and Rawls, “individualists” fail to see the connection between liberty and equality. A cultural theory that obscures this connection by globalizing the partisan worldview of contemporary “individualists” is not only useless as a guide to historical scholarship, but is bound to contribute to individualists’ ideological complacency.³¹

This is what explains my opposition to Cultural Theory—not, as Ellis seems to think, a conservative desire to ensure that everyone is held accountable for their actions (82).³² The attack on liberal and rational-choice complacency about preferences that opened my critique was a call to cultural scholarship, not to “individual responsibility” rather than a “feel-good” ethic (iii). Most contemporary cultural studies have been extensions of leftist politics by other means. While Wildavsky’s essay on elite media egalitarianism is a refreshing departure from this tendency, Cultural Theory would not only render it irrelevant—why should we care about the attitudes conveyed by the media if they do not affect people’s preferences, which are determined by social relations?—but would merely replace leftist cultural studies with a right-wing, or at least “individualistic,” variant. If there is one thing nonleftist cultural theorists should have learned from experience, it is the need to guard against scholarship that perpetuates unexamined political assumptions.

Such assumptions are built into Cultural Theory’s basic conceptual tools. As David Laitin noted before me,³³ Douglas’s categories of “grid” and “group” rest on a preoccupation with what I called the

question of “who should have the authority to decide how to live, i.e. who should have the power of autonomous choice: the individual or some hierarchy placed over him/her.”³⁴ As a result, all of Cultural Theory’s categories are skewed, leading to misunderstandings of what motivates non-“individualists” and to the elevation of “individualism” into the status of a timeless cultural bias simply by virtue of the fact that Douglas’s schema contains a low-“grid,” low-“group” box. There would be nothing wrong with this if Cultural Theory treated its boxes as ideal types that might have little relevance to a given culture; the whole problem with the theory is that its categories are assumed, *a priori*, to find real and indeed exhaustive support in all cultures at all times. This leads Ellis to imagine that our culture is characterized by a monumental “conflict between liberty and fraternity” (83); a more empirically scrupulous observer would find the feeble resistance of laissez-faire liberals to be no match for the cultural consensus in favor of the fraternally liberal (welfare) state, backed as it is by some of our most important and longstanding *individualistic* assumptions. The political divisions with which Cultural Theory is so intimately bound up are hardly central to public debate even in the United States, where, for example, discussion of national health insurance centers on its feasibility as a way to provide equal medical care for all, not its effect on the freedom to preserve one’s income from taxation.

Ellis never disputes the substance of my demonstration that the egalitarianism of Marx, Foucault, Christa Wolf, and the advocates of multiculturalism is intrinsically individualistic; he contents himself with listing the differences between these leftist egalitarian individualists and their more conservative critics—as if there can be no differences among egalitarian individualists as to how best to interpret their common doctrine. “Conflicting understandings of freedom and equality,” in Rawls’s words, set “the present practical task of political philosophy.”³⁵ A good cultural theory should be able to do more than note these conflicts; it should explain them—as my account attempted to do.³⁶ Cultural Theory—trapped between social reductionism and the simple description of atomistically chosen bundles of preferences—cannot. What Cultural Theory does achieve, however, is to reify these differences, and the ideologically driven mistakes they embody, into timeless universals. This is preferable to the view articulated by Rawls, von Stein, Simmel, and Durkheim only if one is concerned to defend the “individualistic” bias against the possibility that its internal logic, as reflected in the leftward evolution of liberalism since Locke, leads to “egalitarian” conclusions.³⁷ When Ellis claims that Cultural Theory

allows “unexamined premises [to] be brought to the surface and examined” (115), perhaps he thinks liberals, conservatives, and the impoverished will be chastened to learn that they are actually egalitarians, hierarchists, and fatalists; but I wonder how much self-critical illumination Cultural Theory can bring to “individualists” who, according to its teaching, are engaged in an endless and therefore implicitly legitimate struggle against the constricting forces of egalitarianism.

It would be bad enough if Cultural Theory offered comfort to the apriorism that is already endemic among nonleftist scholars (who tend, for all their statistical orientation, to assert rather than demonstrate that their picture of the world is valid); or if it encouraged the unscholarly, political impulse to legitimize “market individualism” (84) by dubbing it one of four or five eternally valid social choices. But what inspires my animus against Cultural Theory more than anything else is that on top of those sins, it provides a new rationalization for stereotyping and thus ignoring what the left actually stands for. Previous stereotypes that accomplished the same purpose were the myth that in the late nineteenth century, statisticians managed to steal the glorious term “liberal” from antigovernment classical liberals—*somehow*, despite their diametrical opposition to classical liberal tenets; and Hayek’s notion that in embracing government policies that would impose centralized control on market economies, leftists are not simply assuming what is intuitively plausible (if one is unaware of arguments to the contrary by free-marketeers such as Hayek himself)—that such control is feasible—but that they *must be* influenced by a “constructivist” tradition of social thought that originated in early nineteenth-century France.³⁷ These pseudohistorical claims could not be more perfectly designed to encourage contemporary nonleftist scholars to complacently dismiss their political opponents. Now we can add Cultural Theory to the list—as demonstrated by the facility with which Ellis uses it to misconstrue the economic and cultural left.

Ellis’s claim that Cultural Theory can elevate political discussion by allowing advocates of opposing viewpoints to better understand themselves and each other is belied by the fact that—if one interprets the theory as attributing political attitudes to social relations—there could be no more ferocious conflict than between partisans who are irremediably moved not by arguments (of the sort transmitted by culturally contingent institutions), but by socially induced biases. If anything, such a Cultural Theory would justify “egalitarians” in ignoring “individualistic” arguments (and vice versa—therein lies one ideological charm of the theory) on the ground that arguments are

irrelevant to the source of one's opponents preferences. On the other hand, if one retreats to the nondeterministic version of the theory, there is still the fact that by dichotomizing individualism and egalitarianism on the basis of "group," the theory utterly misinterprets the left as desiring not for all to be equally free, but for all to be equally "bounded by a collectivity" (85). Nobody could seriously mean this as a description of the "package of beliefs" held by Rawls, Marx, Foucault, or even Wolf or the multiculturalists (who, if they were collectivists, as Ellis claims, could hardly object to subordinating individuals to "dominant group[s]"—as Ellis quotes a college administrator as doing [87]). Nor does it accurately describe the Jacksonian Democrats Ellis calls egalitarians (97), who were second to none in their championship of individual self-reliance (not mere freedom from an inequalitarian government). Similarly, to characterize anti-abortionists as "hierarchists" rather than as defenders of what they see as the equal rights of the unborn (118) is hardly an example of "sympathetically inhabit[ing] the positions of others" (115). One cannot but suspect, from such instances of its application, that Cultural Theory inhibits *Verstehen* rather than enhancing it.

A serious attempt to understand one's own or other views would not rule out in advance any possible influence: social or economic, political, religious, intellectual. Most cultural historians (as opposed, perhaps, to many "social scientists") make a practice of trying to take all such influences into account by studying their embodiment in historically changing, institutionalized traditions. Among historians—if less than among social scientists—this has rarely resulted in the reductionism Cultural Theorists laudably set out to reject. Unfortunately, by rejecting as well the historical path to understanding people's "preferences," Cultural Theory either posits a priori "packages" of preferences whose occurrence at a given time and place is inexplicable, or it brings in social reductionism through the back door.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences: Cultural Theory vs. Cultural History," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 325–51.
2. Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).
3. Friedman, 333.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 333–34.

6. Ibid., 343.
7. Ibid., 344, *emph. added*.
8. Ibid., 335.
9. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).
10. Friedman, 335.
11. Ibid., 335–36.
12. Ibid., 339.
13. Ibid., 336–37.
14. E.g. Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky, “A Cultural Analysis of the Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 1 (January 1990): 89–106. “We argue that these differences in ideas—immediatism versus antislavery gradualism—*correspond* to differences between egalitarian and individualist ways of life,” 96, *emph. added*.
15. Thompson et al., 55.
16. We cannot really believe that our ideas are *merely* given to us by our social relations (or vice versa), for this would preclude the veracity of our ideas (or the legitimacy of our social practices): it would undercut any grounds for preferring given ideas (or practices) to those that have not been given. Facing the need to choose some ideas or practices over others, we literally must prefer some to others. It is thus quite impossible to believe in the total autonomy of society (or conversely that of Ideas in the Hegelian sense); our freedom is an inescapable presupposition of our thought. But this makes our freedom *real*: that is what it *means* to say we have no choice but to believe in it. Cf. my “After Libertarianism: Rejoinder to Narveson, McCloskey, Flew, and Machan,” *CRITICAL REVIEW* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 113–52, at 129–33.
 I hasten to add that the inescapability of freedom carries no normative implications. Just because we have no honest alternative but to recognize our freedom does not make freedom desirable or laudatory. It is merely a fact that leads to no values without the intervention of other assumptions. Indeed, since freedom of this sort is simply a consequence of our unavoidable need to make choices, there is something perverse about elevating it into an end in itself: freedom is properly extinguished in action, to which it is but a precondition. On the other hand, since choices are instrumental to ends whose perceived worth is heavily influenced by culturally transmitted values, any picture of *purely* instrumental rationality, such as that in the surprise theory of change and in rational choice models of political behavior, is untenable.
17. Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, vol. 1 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1968), 293.
18. Friedman, “Accounting for Political Preferences,” 351n10.

19. In fairness, *Cultural Theory* (268–69) does try to square this circle, relying on Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). But MacIntyre's claim for the authority of traditions is more normative than epistemic: his point is that we *should* obey traditions more than that we *must*. This allows him to suggest legitimately that we should reform our traditions when they hit dead ends. Cultural Theory, in its reductionist version, allows for no appeal beyond socially determined ways of life, so the surprise theory must rely, in contrast to MacIntyre, on an underdetermined atomism if people are to be able to compare and discard traditions.
20. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 347.
21. *Ibid.*, 348.
22. Thompson et al., 2.
23. Aaron Wildavsky, "The Media's 'American Egalitarians,'" *The Public Interest* no. 88 (Summer 1987): 94–104.
24. Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), ch. 6. Compounding the irony, Schama draws on Mary Douglas in his explanation — not on her grid/group schema, but on her insight into the meaning of dirt (381). By exploring the conjunction of Dutch economic success with Christian ethical traditions, Schama puts this insight to use in understanding Dutch cleanliness.
25. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 345.
26. John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1985): 223–51, at 235.
27. G. A. Cohen, "Self-Ownership, World Ownership, and Equality: Part II," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 77–96, at 95.
28. Lorenz von Stein, *The History of the Social Movement in France, 1789–1850*, tr. Kaethe Mengelberg (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1964), 82, 259, 269.
29. Georg Simmel, "Freedom and the Individual," in Donald N. Levine, ed., *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 219–20, 220–21, 221–22.
30. Emile Durkheim, "Individualism and the Intellectuals," in Robert N. Bellah, ed., *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 48–49. Cf. Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 22–23:

Libertarian demands for liberty typically include important features of 'equal liberty', e.g. the insistence on equal immunity from interference by others. The belief that liberty is important cannot, thus, be in conflict with the view that it is important that the social arrangements be devised to promote equality of liberties that people have. . . . It is neither accurate nor helpful to think of the difference in either case in terms of 'liberty *versus* equality'.

Indeed, strictly speaking, posing the problem in terms of this latter contrast reflects a 'category mistake'. They are not alternatives. Liberty is among the possible *fields of application* of equality, and equality is among the possible *patterns* of distribution of liberty.

31. Cf. my "The New Consensus: II. The Democratic Welfare State," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 4, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 661-62.
32. It is instructive how quickly Ellis reverts to conventional political biases in order to classify my views. How do the five universal preferences explain my opposition to both Cultural Theory's individualism and rational-choice theory's purported repudiation of individual responsibility?
33. David Laitin, "Political Culture and Political Preferences," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 1 (March 1987): 589-93.
34. Friedman, "Accounting for Political Preferences," 346.
35. John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory: The Dewey Lectures 1980," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 9 (September 1980): 515-72, at 21.
36. Thus, each aspect of Ellis's *description* of multiculturalism (86-87) is historically and logically *explained* in "Accounting for Political Preferences," 331-32.
37. Friedman, "After Libertarianism," 115-16.
38. On "constructivism" see Friedman, "After Libertarianism," 150-51n40.
39. Given my explicit and lengthy discussion of "the immensely important differences in the lives that are possible in the First and Second Worlds," I have to register a complaint against Ellis's interpretation of my refusal to accept the easy oppositions "capitalism-socialism, freedom-equality, liberalism-Marxism" as in any way minimizing the differences between Hong Kong and Cambodia (86) or between Stalinism and capitalism (85). Jeffrey Friedman, "The New Consensus: I. The Fukuyama Thesis," *CRITICAL REVIEW* 3, nos. 3-4: 373-410, at 402. The first half of this article explained the differences in terms of the impossibility of socialist economic calculation in a complex economy; this, I argued, condemned "socialist" states after the failure of Russian War Communism to massively and irrationally intervene in their grossly distorted but still essentially capitalist economies. So as to preserve the triumphalist notion that in 1989 capitalism decisively defeated socialism, Ellis arbitrarily suggests that the Second World was 98 percent socialist and that the First World is 98 percent capitalist (117n17). Not only does he imagine that he is engaged in a mighty battle with the forces of egalitarianism; he seems to think his side is winning. Even in the United States, though, the government consumes far more than two percent of GNP. Both "socialist" and "capitalist" countries have mixed economies, compromises between the egalitarian-individualist pressure for socialism on the one hand and the practical necessity to use markets to produce goods on the other. Our cultural theories should not only allow for this possibility, but help explain it.

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